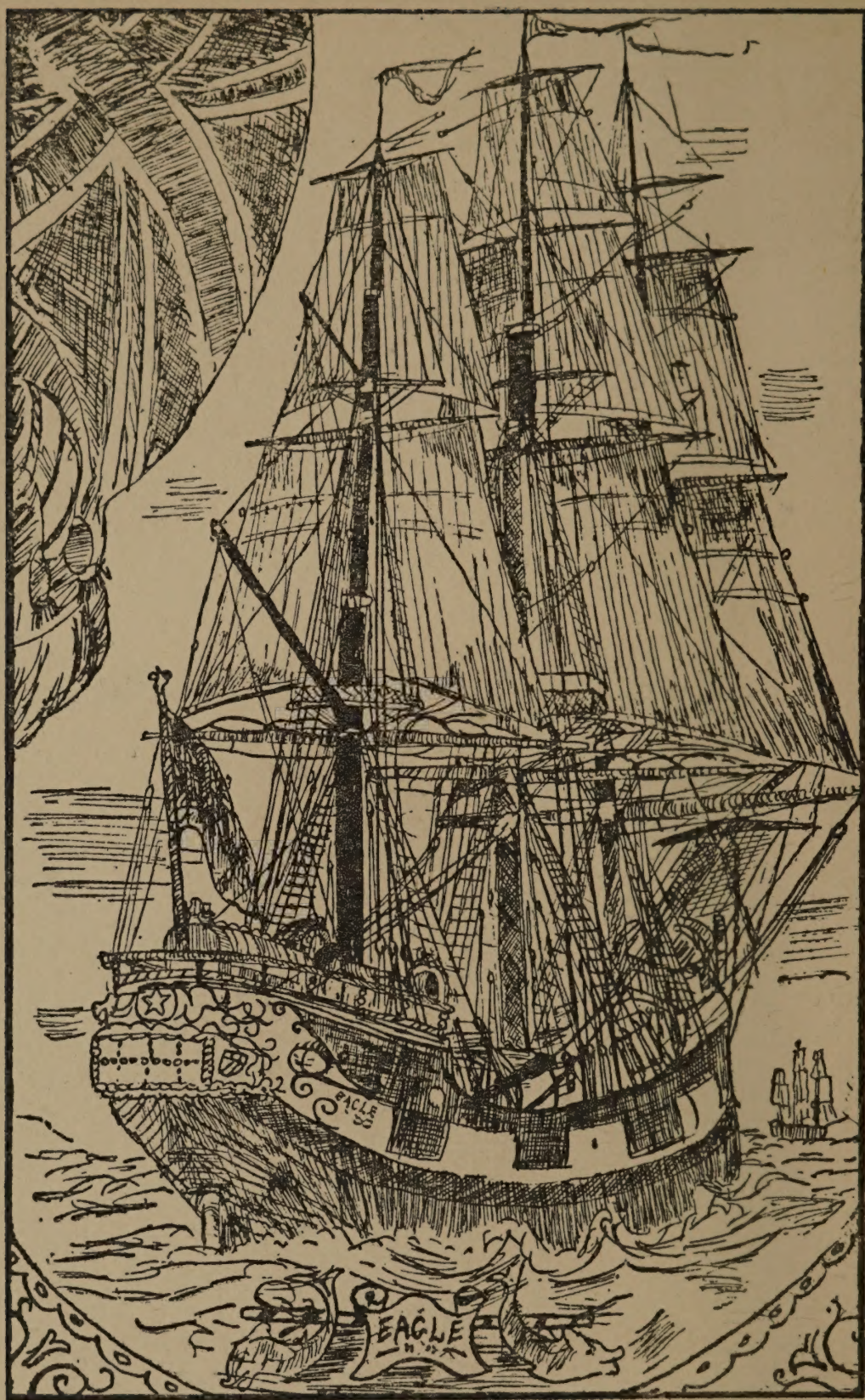


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A STATELY SOUTHERNER



[Frontispiece

A STATELY SOUTHERNER

BY

REX CLEMENTS

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With pen and ink sketches by A. Weston



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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
CAPTAIN GEORGE CLEMENTS
1ST ROYAL DRAGOONS
"ALMA," "BALACLAVA"
"INKERMANN," "SEBASTOPOL"

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A STATELY SOUTHERNER

“Going up a while after to London, the offer of a warm voyage and a long one, both which I always desired, soon carried me to sea again.”—WILLIAM DAMPIER.

THE FIRST WATCH

A TALL ship and a second mate's billet—there are few better ways of seeing the world. So at least I thought when, after six weeks of "sailortown," a berth in the *Southern Cross* was offered me. She was a lofty, four-masted barque, black-hulled, white-sparred, with the lines of a flyer—the iron and steel embodiment of an albatross. I liked her the moment I saw her. Not even the commonplace surroundings of the Asia Dock could disguise the beauty of her knife-like entrance and the symmetry of her raking masts. Loaded almost down to her Plimsoll, she was then taking in the last of her cargo for Calcutta.

Twenty-four hours after I joined her, we sailed. We towed down the Schelde, set sail off Dungeness, and ran down Channel before a fresh nor'-easterly breeze. The barque behaved as handsomely as she looked. Merely to step out of the companionway, to feel the rush of wind past one's ears, and see the tiering spread of canvas on each steeply-sloping mast was worth many weeks of waiting to experience. "He who has once drunk of the waters of Nile," say the Arabs, "always returns." If the assertion be true of that stark stream ribboning the desert, much more is it true of a draught from the scuttle butt, shaded by tall canvas and cooled by winds of the Atlantic.

The following night I had my first experience as officer of the watch. All the way down Channel the captain had kept the deck. With the Casquets

astern, the coastal traffic had thinned out, and, as the man at the wheel struck three bells, he turned to go below.

At the top of the companionway he paused : " Call me if there is any change," said he, and straightway disappeared. I crossed over to windward, to the post he had left vacant.

It was a dark, blustering night, with a fresh t'gallant breeze blowing, and a tumbling, white-capped sea that made the barque plunge and quiver handsomely. Already the short Channel waves were giving place to the longer surge and 'scend of the Atlantic. Though gusty, the weather was not threatening : the barque was carrying plenty of sail, but the long meridians before her seemed empty of traffic, and the illimitable sea was profound in its loneliness.

I paced the weather side, alert and keenly alive to the responsibilities of the situation. The barque rose and fell, resistlessly cleaving the seas asunder ; the drone of the wind resounded down the long perspective of sails overhead ; the few stars visible gleamed and twinkled like tossing pennons above the endless ranks of the hurrying sea.

Methodically, back and fore, I paced the poop. Conscious that the ship and her company were in my sole charge, and elated at the thought, I kept my eyes roving over the wind-filled hollows of canvas aloft, and felt—such is the potency of youth and inexperience to transmute its metal into gold—that the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them, or their equivalent at least, had been given into my keeping.

How I watched the ship that gusty Atlantic night ! Not a reef point fluttered, beating a quick tattoo against the inflexible drumhead of the canvas ; not a star gleamed for a moment beyond the edges of a cloud, and escaped my observation. I searched the

heavens to windward with a scrutiny hardly to be surpassed by a castaway adrift on a raft in mid-ocean, and watched the steering with the solicitude of a mother bending over her child.

The breeze boomed steadily away, rising at times to boisterous gusts that canted the barque to a smart angle, and sent the water swirling through the lee scuppers with a violence and impetuosity that would have taken a man off his feet. Half a dozen times I made up my mind that the fore t'gallant-sail would have to come in. Each time, before I decided to frame the order, the topmost stress took off, and I felt convinced that the barque had a further reserve of staying power and was not yet taxed to the limit of her strength. So I hung on, watching everything with a vigilance so acute that my head hummed and vibrated with the strain, as though in sympathy with the rigid fabric overhead.

The minutes slipped by. The breeze piped and whistled, and the straining canvas gave off a deep sonorous hum, but the horizon kept clear to windward, and I was desperately anxious to do the right thing. The captain, I had heard, was a sail-carrier: every second mate no doubt has desired to be so too. Yet, such ambition prompting or not, it is an exceedingly ticklish thing to know when to shorten sail, and to be able to lay one's finger, unerringly and without hesitation, on that fine and elusive point which makes all the difference between a seaman making a passage and a careless fool contemplating a wreck.

Moreover, the t'gallant-sails are not sails to be played with. A staysail or a royal does not matter so much, but the t'gallant-sails are different. They are called the "passage makers," by reason of the fact that at their elevation the wind is always steady and not subject to fits and starts as it is nearer the surface in a heavy sea, when a vessel is sometimes

perched on a windy summit, sometimes wallowing in a sheltered trough. Passage makers the t'gallant-sails are; and, more than any other sail in the ship, the time between port and port is to be measured by the uninterrupted regularity with which they are spread to the wind. Beloved by the crafty in sea-cunning, they are hauled in and out by the others with the incertitude of a girl trying on a new hat, and have proved a touchstone to all. With an almost painful sense of perception, I realized it.

I realized it, and determined to hang on. The blustering clouds seemed to have no malice in them, and the glass was reassuringly steady. Apart from squalls, the barque was easy enough; and, after a tour of the decks, I resumed my pacing of the poop with an added feeling of assurance. But I continued to take no risks of being caught unawares: the Second Advent will hardly be watched more closely.

Just before midnight a squall did blow up. It blotted out the sky to windward and came on swiftly. There was evidently wind behind it, and how much was uncertain. I stopped at the rail and peered at it. Should I, or should I not, clew up that fore t'gallant-sail? I was anxious to stand justified in the eyes of the mate when he came on deck, and, more than that, I wanted to handle the ship properly. A fine start it would be if I brought the sticks out of her! Should I, or should I not?

The squall came on fiercely. For a moment I hesitated. I stared into its black murk intensely, and, doing so, thought that I could discern the skyline behind. The "old man" I had served my time with had often told me there was no need to lower away for any squall one could see through. I searched this one penetratingly. It was black and ominous, but now—here—surely—I could pierce its dark opacity? Good enough! my mind was made up.

“Luff a little,” said I to the man at the helm, with, I flatter myself, no trace of indecision.

Fowler, one of the senior apprentices, was at the wheel: he was a good steersman, and brought the ship gently to the wind, with the leaches just quivering.

The squall swept down on us, struck the ship, and, for one brief moment, I feared I had made a horrible miscalculation.

The screaming wind tore at the barque, the roar of straining canvas rose louder and louder aloft, the masts and decks canted to an alarming angle, and a leaping sea, hitting the barque on the quarter, was driven in tumultuous sheets across the whole length of the poop. In an agony of apprehension I feared I had overdone it.

“Keep her close!” I yelled to the helmsman, and struggled to the poop rail, intending to shout an order to lower away the t’gallant halyards. As I fought my way to the break I still kept my eyes fixed on the quarter from which the wind was coming. It was pitch black, but through the spray-swept darkness I thought I could discern a lightening to windward. Hard to say . . . the roaring wet greyness that enveloped everything made even thought difficult . . . and yet surely . . . that misty smudge . . . just before the beam . . . a rift!

A moment more, and there was never a doubt of it; I was prepared to swear I saw it clearing. The hail was stayed upon my lips. Now or never was the crucial moment; it would be altogether too heartbreaking to bungle.

Savagely the squall beat down on us. The good gear held, the spindrift blew in a smother across the decks, and the half-hidden outlines of the sails aloft shrieked in their recesses like an angry giant stampeding through the caverns of the night. The barque was about taxed to her limit.

To another turn of the relentless screw something must have gone. The moments were like days, but the conflict in my mind was over—there was doubt no longer, only the lust of battle, and a heartfelt triumph in the behaviour of the gallant ship. I still forbore to shout for the t'gallant-sails to be lowered. A minute, a second more, I told myself, and we shall have won through. Half beaten to the sea, the bending masts drove the hull furiously on; the water, hissing in a white froth, was waist-deep to leeward. A vicious blast caught the weather dodger and swept one of its lanyards across my face. I scarcely felt it, though it drew blood. Eyes and brain alike were too absorbed in watching the struggle of the hard-pressed ship.

That whiplash marked its passing. As though it were a last vindictive effort, the howling edge of the squall dulled a little, its topmost stress took off, and, plainly and beyond dispute, I could at last see through its inky murkiness, and perceive the horizon lightening to windward. Thank heaven! the worst was past.

The wind lessened still more and, as I was still silently thanking the powers that be, the man at the wheel struck eight bells. My watch was up! In the excitement of the moment I had never so much as heard the striking of one bell.

Two minutes later the mate came on deck and, to a clearing sky, the barque plunged easily to a tumbling sea, with the heels of the squall rapidly receding to leeward. I handed over to O'Callaghan with a sense of thankfulness and—to be candid—a glow of something like triumph. The first watch was over, and ship and crew had come safely through, undisastered in my keeping.

No out-of-the-way experience—common, in fact, as any sea experience can be—yet the memory of that watch is scored indelibly on my mind.

“THE LADIES’ GULF”

THAT portion of the Atlantic between Cancer and the Line is for the most part a region of blue skies and seas and fair summer weather. With the exception of the variable belt of the doldrums (which may at times be avoided altogether), it is as pleasant a piece of water as one could wish to sail and well deserves the name of the “ladies’ gulf,” given it by the Spaniards of old.

Across its parallels the *Southern Cross* ran joyously—every rag set, and the yards just clear of the backstays. The rollicking wind blew fresh and true, the ship snored steadily on through the tumbling waves, and all around spread the flashing sunshine. By night the great stars burned and sparkled with a brilliance unknown under northern skies. The watches were all too short; not even the “churchyard” was a grievance, and the “dead-eye,” as it is called, instead of being the most miserable spell in the twenty-four hours, was the most pleasant.

Sunrise came then, and sunrise at sea in those latitudes is a sight worth losing an hour’s sleep to see. Over the far rim of the sea came a pale flush, a suggestion of something sentient behind the canopy of night, moving the heavy folds of her black curtain. The flush glowed and quivered. It became more palpable, licking up the eastern sky in swift tongues and wavelets of light, and reaching out on either hand in a broad flood of sapphire. It spread and spread, unrolling itself in changing veils of colour, putting out the stars and shrinking into nothingness the shades of night.

Suddenly the fire-fraught lower edge of the sky turned rose-pink, red and molten gold. A flash of burning flame quivered on the horizon, lifted above the waves, shaped itself into the blinding globe of the sun, and started majestically to climb towards the zenith. It was a swift-moving pageant; one watched it spellbound, and when dazzled eyes were turned away—behold! it was broad day.

And every phase of the sun's rising was reflected in the shadowy fabric overhead. The sails were dark hollows on the purple pall of night when it began—gloomy, murmurous and abysmal. Tender lights awoke and shivered through them as the moments passed; they towered heavenwards like triple shades of a gigantic ghost. A minute more, and they soared distinctly into sight. Firm, white-arched and rounded, they stood out against the pure dawning—shouting, straining chariots driving down the sky.

And, as it rises, “so sinks the day-star in the ocean bed.” But then there is a touch of sadness that is lacking in the vigour and freshness of its uprising. Its tumultuous dying hues suggest parting, grief and the transience of everything mortal. On quiet evenings a long low organ note seems to come ebbing and sounding over the waves, floating and echoing around, as though the deep heart of old Ocean had found utterance. What causes the sound, I do not know. Yet it is not mere fancy; most sailormen have heard it. Low, plaintive and haunting, it comes on the ear like the threne of the sea, the swan song of its immemorial age, learnt as a lullaby in the long ago.

So fair unfailingly were the gateways of alternate night and day as the barque surged south, often logging a clear ten knots, across windy spaces whereof she was the only occupant.

Let guidebooks sing the praises of this or that,

the most beautiful thing in the world is the face of the sky—common to all regions alike. Neither rivers, trees, and mountains, nor the stateliest of the works of man, surpass it. And the sailor’s advantage is this, that he moves for ever at the centre of the heavens’ immeasurable magnificence. The quarried hives of men have much to answer for in that their “ cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces ” obscure it. To city-dwellers the sky is wellnigh invisible. And its most beautiful and constantly changing part, that immediately above the horizon, they may never see. The loss is such as to require many compensations to balance it: truly he was a wise old Greek who said that one may always see the sun and stars and waters, and that, live a hundred years or a few weeks, one will never see any greater thing.

In two degrees north latitude we picked up the South-east Trades, changing from one to the other in the course of a few squally hours. They were blowing freshly before nightfall, and all through the hours of darkness the barque ran all out and a-tiptoe for the Line.

We were unduly far to the westward. One’s traverses in a windjammer were not made wholly at will, but had been laid down by almighty decree at the creation of the world, when first the winds took up their stations. Nor is the Atlantic so simple a piece of water to navigate from north to south as it appears to be on a map. The configuration of its Equatorial coasts is responsible, making the dividing line between its northern and southern portions many leagues distant from the Equator. The real “ Line ”—geographical, meteorological and actual—is always to the north of the charted Equator, and runs, say, from the neighbourhood of Maranhão to the coast of Sierra Leone.

The result is that the longitude in which one

crosses often makes all the difference between a smart passage and the reverse. Keep to the eastward—the route of the old East Indiamen—and the belt of calms and light winds is much broader. Avoid it, and stand to the west—the track of the clippers—the distance to be covered is greater and—here's the rub—the Equatorial Current increases in strength and adds to the danger of being horsed to the westward of Cape San Roque.

The westerly set is always strong, and made the Cape a bugbear to old-time outward-bounders. There is small cause for wonder that Cabral discovered the Brazils on his way to India. The wonder would have been if, in his lobster-pots of caravels, he had missed sighting it.

We risked being embayed by San Roque or piling up on the Recife. The *Southern Cross* was a weatherly ship, and, having a fresh breeze, we made the most of it. We expected to cross the Line by daybreak—in the neighbourhood of Saint Paul's Rocks, it promised to be—for Captain Pettigrew had warned us the previous evening to keep a sharp look-out for land.

It happened to be my watch on deck that morning, and as the light grew broad on the face of the sea, the look-out man reported "Land-ho!" on the port bow. I ran for'ard, and one glance was enough to assure us that the broken fragments of land widening on the bow were the dreaded rocks.

We came up with them rapidly. As the light grew, they took shape as a cluster of bare, verdureless, guano-covered islands, under a hundred feet high and not more than half a mile in length. Situated on the Equator, they are an unlooked-for apparition—five hundred miles from the American mainland and surrounded on all sides by deep water. More leisurely voyagers than ourselves have explored them and report that they are the tops of immense sub-



St. Paul's Rocks.

marine mountains, heaved up out of the depths by volcanic pressure. Such action has often been recorded in the neighbourhood, and at one time or another a host of remarkable phenomena and mysterious vigias have been reported by passing captains. It is said that there is anchorage of a sort off the northern shore of one of the islands, in the shape of a shallow bay, which is itself the crater of an extinct volcano.

As we drew closer, leaning steeply to the glorious breeze, we could make out that the islands were four or five in number. They were given over to innumerable multitudes of sea-birds. Flights of them were circling over the rocks, or diving for fish into the surrounding sea. Though the swell was inconsiderable, a heavy surf was breaking on the rocks, its roar being plainly audible on board. We shaped a course to pass quite close to them. Formidable as they are in themselves, fortunately there are no out-lying reefs to add to the danger.

We quickly brought them abeam. They are wholly uninhabited; though I believe it is possible to land on one or two of them. One would like to have attempted it: they are intriguing little footholds of dry land, so small, bare and unneighbourled in the deep sea. They give rise to all sorts of guesses. What, one wonders, is their history? A history they must have, and probably a grim one, though unwritten. The Spaniards discovered them, and, like most things Spanish, they bear a saint's name. The Peñedo, or mass of rocks of San Pedro, they dubbed them. Why, it is hard to say; as hard as to say why we should call them after his brother apostle. Perhaps in the pious hope that there is something in a name, and that, so-called, they may outgrow their nature and turn into an island paradise. A frail hope! From the look of them, neither Peter nor Paul, nor the whole army of the canonized, can redeem them

from being what they have always been—a deadly landfall for seafarers.

Unlike the Rocas, that other sentinel of the South Atlantic, they are luckily visible at some distance. One does not come upon them, as upon the Rocas, unawares. Running before a stiff breeze that curls the sea into a line of white breakers, one sights the latter before one does the reef.

Nevertheless, they have taken their full toll of ships. They are as fatal a reef as the Atlantic holds and an ever-open trap. A spider’s web, rather, whose accomplice is the currents and whose filaments are thin lines of rock awash, knitted together by islets of black rock. Nor are shrivelled victims wanting to complete the simile. The warped and sun-dried ruins of a number of wrecks lie here and there about the reefs—grotesque skeletons, like dead flies in a mesh.

They made a striking picture as we ran past. All around reached the unbroken blue of the tropic sea, and, in the foreground, this low, black, sinister reef, with its gnarled spikes of rock, its hungrily moaning surf, and its aspect of utter loneliness and desolation. The naked splinters of stone stood up out of the sea like the jaws of a huge crocodile, some ancient petrified monster of the world’s prime, gaping in hungry malice from its lair in mid-ocean.

They passed astern, and with them passed the old historic hemisphere of land under the septentrion. Before us, bathed in sun and blue air, stretched the South Atlantic—of all the great oceans the simplest to navigate, the most regular in its winds and currents, the most free from cyclones and other disturbances. The rocks dipped from sight. Once again the many twinkling sea reached to the horizon, unvexed by ill-named islands or more pretentious pieces of land. And, for a sailor, the sea is enough.

“THE WIDE ETHIOPIAN”

THE name of the Indian Ocean does not do justice to its vastness. India is an important portion of the earth's surface, but in size a mere shark's tooth embedded in the whale's bulk of the polar-stretching ocean. It is a pity that its more ancient name of the Ethiopic or Ethiopian Ocean has died out. Besides being a better title, it suggests something of the richness, the torrid heat and vague and antique splendour attaching to the empire of Prester John.

Unaware of the immensity of far-flung Africa, the ancients gave the name to the whole of the southern ocean, Atlantic and Indian alike. It has adhered only to the former, though not without protest. Dampier very cogently argued that if “the name must be appropriated, why to this on the West of Africa? why not rather to that on its east coast? which lies nearer the inward or more proper Ethiopia, now the Abissine Empire? and consequently might better be called Ethiopick Sea.”

Milton goes further and boldly calls it by its venerable name. Says he in a gorgeous passage, which is sheer joy to a seaman :

“As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring
Their spicy drugs : they on the trading flood
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape
Ply, stemming nightly toward the pole.”

and if it be argued that this applies equally to the South Atlantic, the answer is “ not when sailing from Bengal or the Moluccas.”

Across this “ wide Ethiopian ” we logged our way leisurely. We had the ocean to ourselves, both in the absence of islands and passing ships, and from dawn to dusk the sky shut down on the distant rim of the sea, unbroken by any faintest speck. For the most part it was a silent, sunlit, gently-heaving expanse, blotted and vexed at times by threatening black clouds and sudden downpours of rain. One longed on occasion for a cutting blast of wind, and to see the barque’s head go down in a headlong smother of foam. O’Callaghan, more accustomed to the Colonial run and the drenchings and buffetings of the Roaring Forties, was loud in his denunciations of such holiday seafaring.

Across the Line we drifted—mirage, waterspouts and lightning our sole accompaniments. The sea ran sluggishly, with a bottle-green tint about it that suggested strange secrets in its unfathomable depths. At night the stars twinkled faintly, like blown sparks in a cave, and they too suggested the idea of unimaginable remoteness.

The meteorological conditions were much out of the ordinary. The lightning displays every evening were remarkable in their erratic green and white and blue magnificence, and in the noiseless intensity with which they flared and trickled all round the skyline.

Keeping my watch one night, I was surprised by the appearance of the most enormous meteor. It flashed out in the sky, seemingly just beyond our fore royal yard. In size it was bigger than the full moon, of blinding brilliance, and drew behind it a short wedge-shaped tail of violet-coloured light. Swiftly it crossed an arc of the heavens of perhaps forty degrees, making the air, for the few seconds it was visible, as light as day.

The whole ocean was lit up. The strange hard glare fell on spars and sails, picking them out in white blotches on a purple background : it gleamed on the black sea that ran in sickly grey swells to an invisible horizon ; it blotted out the stars and left only a vision of a white spectre-ship poised in an immensity of ghostly phosphorescence, with the blackness of chaos beyond.

The following day we encountered a still stranger phenomenon. It was during the dog watch, and near "knocking off" time. The men were putting the gear away, and Ferguson was coming down the fore-rigging, from where he had been working on the top-sail yard. He stopped, and I saw him look intently to windward ; then he hailed the deck with an outstretched arm and a loud :

"Land on the weather bow, sir !"

The hail surprised me. We were, as I knew, nowhere near land. I went for'ard and climbed on the fo'c'sle head to look at what he was pointing.

I saw it plainly enough, and it looked like land, beyond dispute. An island, as near as I could discern, standing out in clear grey silhouette on the skyline, with a bluff rounded hill at one end, sloping down into a lower plateau, whose edge only just showed above the skyline. It lay about two points on the bow, and I stared at it nonplussed, for the nearest land was the Chagos Archipelago, almost as far to the west as Sumatra was to the east. Yet, to my mind, there was no mistaking the reality of what I saw, and I returned aft to call the old man.

It did not seem possible that it could be mirage, though mirage, as I knew well, can play strange tricks. Once in the China Sea, at the change of the monsoon, to the amazement of all hands, on an untenanted ocean we had seen a ship rise above the horizon, upside down, and in that position slowly ascend the sky. She rose to a height of ten degrees

or so, then as slowly sank again and disappeared. Nor did we ever see the actual vessel that was so reflected. On another occasion, in the Malacca Straits, I witnessed a still stranger sight.

It was at night, a dark, still, abnormally clear night. The stars were visible right down to the water's edge, in itself a sufficiently unusual sight. A pale light in the eastern sky proclaimed the coming of the moon, and slowly the lamp of night rose above the horizon. It rose behind a long low island, whose surface was only a few feet above the level of the sea, and down whose length grew a line of feathery palm trees. These palm trees were silhouetted so distinctly against the moon's bronze-coloured disc that I could plainly see each straight trunk and pointed, waving frond. I took a bearing and laid it off on the chart. The island was fourteen miles distant—no inconsiderable distance in which to distinguish the shape and motion of leaves on a dark night.

But the apparition of this island, at which all hands were now staring, was susceptible of no such explanation. It bore every indication of being *terra firma* unquestionably.

The captain was sceptical. “ Land? ” said he, when I told him, “ the only land hereabouts is straight down, at the bottom,” and led the way up the companion, the mate behind him.

He was as astonished as the rest of us when he saw it, and went down again, almost at once, to look at the chart.

“ It's not land,” said he grimly, albeit a trifle dubiously, as he came up two minutes later; then, to the man at the wheel: “ Keep her close!”

We had been steering “ full and bye,” and Fritz could do no more than bring her half a point nearer. He kept the royal leaches a-tremor, but the light was paling, and in any case we could not be up with the land, real or ghostly, till well after dark. The men

were peering at it intently over the rail, and we scanned its distant outlines carefully through the glasses.

I have never seen more obvious land. It had lost the uniform greyness of distance, and one could discern different shades of brown and green on the flanks of its solitary hill. The mate vowed he could make out trees and the line of surf on the foreshore. Even the captain, with the evidence of the chart freshly before his eyes, could only mutter dissatisfied interjections.

We were still staring at it when the shades of night shut down and enshrouded the island in their deepening gloom, leaving the mystery still unsolved. The old man put down his glasses and, now that the island was no longer confronting him, hazarded a dubious statement that it was not land. At the same time, he showed himself disinclined to demonstrate it by steering straight for the place where the uncanny object must be, and ordered the helmsman to let the barque go off a couple of points.

For the next half-hour every soul on board strained his eyes through the darkness to windward. There was much pointing and whispered conversation among the men, and many false alarms and excited "Look! There it is! . . . there, I tell you!" But nothing actually was seen.

What it was, if anything at all, we never learnt, though it was long the theme of heated dispute. I think it cannot have been land after all. We were then traversing an almost islandless part of the ocean, which is besides well-known and often crossed. Our landfall must have been a phantom, a mirage, an Isle of Ghosts.

But in the realm of ghostly existence it had actuality; it was not mere collective hallucination on our part. Though I did not know it at the time, the fact came home to me afterwards with something of

a shock. I learnt that in those self-same latitudes the old East Indiamen had persistently reported the existence of an island, an island that had many times been seen, but never landed upon. It finds an undisputed place on eighteenth century charts. The “ Indian Ocean ” is surely too humdrum a name for such a locality.

THE RIVER OF INDIA

THE north-east monsoon was blowing when the *Southern Cross* came in from sea. She brought up at nightfall in Saugor Roads, furling her sails close inshore, where hosts of insects dimmed her riding-light and fire-flies blew through the rigging. At dawn she weighed; lifting her anchor from the pale, olive-green water and making fast the tug, while the phantom mists of morning wreathed slowly over Kedgerree and floated in thin wisps around the ruined pagoda on the Point.

All day, breaking the water in a brown wash beneath her bows, the barque towed up the Hughli. At first the Sunderbunds stretched away on either hand—green and tangled swamps, beyond the bounds of civilization, abandoned by Europeans and but sparsely dotted with native villages, mud-built and forlorn—the indeterminate conjuncture of barren sea and fertile plain. Dense jungle, the home of wild beasts innumerable, rioted everywhere in primitive confusion; a wilderness of palms, mangroves and whispering casuarina trees. Occasionally, on the banks of the main stream, one caught a glimpse of a village, a temple or a ruined fort, barbaric and oriental in its setting of green trees and swimming heat haze.

As we towed steadily up, the traffic on the river increased in volume. Big liners passed us, and deeply loaded cargo boats; so, too, did many a more

strange and primitive rig. Prominent amongst them—dhows, patelas, budgerows and Moulmein-built country ships—were lumbering river craft, loaded high above the decks with reeds, looking like untidy Noah's arks.

The scene was always changing. Few rivers on earth can compare with the Ganges in interest, and in the antiquity and splendour of the civilization along their banks. From the first morning of the world it has been the main artery of a rich and mighty life. Rising, so the Hindus say, between the knees of Brahma the Creator, it has all the attributes of god-head itself. On certain days in the year it is incumbent on all good Hindus to bathe in its waters, and the heaven of Indra is the portion of those who sleep their last sleep therein.

Like that other holy river, the Nile, it empties itself into the sea by many mouths. The delta commences some two hundred miles from the ocean, and consists of two main passages linked together by an innumerable network of smaller streams. All are subject to an annual inundation, similar to that which occurs on the Nile, the Hoang-ho and the Amazon. Commencing in April, the waters are at their height in July, and subside in September. All the low country about the Sunderbunds is then flooded; nothing being visible but the tops of trees and the villages, which are built on artificial mounds above the height of the inundation.

The land was dry when the barque towed up. Before noon we passed the notorious "James and Mary." They are shifting quicksands, deceitful and dangerous exceedingly, reaching half-way across the river in a rippling, shimmering expanse. Fine ships not a few have come to grief in their depths. At the pilot's request, a couple of hands were sent for'ard to stand by the towing hawsers while the ship was passing them, and stood by under the mate's eye with axes,

ready to cut away at a moment's notice if anything happened. The barque turned and twisted sharply for a few minutes, often with the shallow, lapping water within a biscuit's throw of the side, then emerged into a clearer reach without misadventure.

How the old East Indiamen, in the days before steam, ever managed to get up to Calcutta, is something of a mystery. It was thought no slight feat when the tea-clipper *Sir Lancelot* sailed up unaided to her moorings off the "Pepper Box." One pictures those bluff old sea-wagons tiding it up, water sails spread and kedges laid out, with patience and labour insatiable. The "James and Mary" took its name from an East Indiaman, the *Royal James and Mary*, which was overset upon them in the year 1692, and has ever been well hated of sailors.

Diamond Harbour, Budge-Budge and Garden Reach—names well known to Eastern traders—were passed in turn. The day drew on. The traffic on the river increased in volume; predatory "bromley kites" began to wheel and circle overhead; and, at about five in the afternoon, convoyed by bands of those light Mahrattas of the air, we came in sight of the domes and pinnacles of Calcutta.

The hands were sent aloft to put a "harbour stow" on the sails as we towed up the last reach. It was March, and the Indian sun had not attained its full strength. At the height of summer the iron yards of a sailing ship were too hot for men to lay out upon during the daytime, and the sails had perforce to be left unfurled till sunset.

The westering sun lay full on the broad green Maidan, as we breasted the Hastings Moorings. Its rays fell on the fringe of tall-sparred sailing ships, reaching down to Kidderpore and beyond; on the ramparts of Fort William at its farther end; on Dharamtollah Mosque, turning its metal cupolas to flashing gold; on the waving green of the Eden



Diamond Harbour.

Gardens; and, across the broad stream, on Howrah, busy and congested, its factory chimneys belching smoke—a swart Cinderella to its more favoured sister.

The barque slanted in to the bund, and two gangs of coolies in lighters came alongside to help in the heavy task of making us fast at our moorings. They secured their cumbrous craft under the bows, and set to work, lowering our great cables down into them. They worked to a monotonous, long-drawn-out chant, toiling like brown elves at the Brobdingnagian overhanging links.

Carefully the cables were lowered. Thirty fathoms were unshackled from each and passed out through the quarter pipes to two buoys astern. Then, to port and starboard, the ponderous chains were fleeted down and secured to strongly-moored buoys ahead. Such precautions were imperative: the Hughli is subject to a bore that raises the water of the river a full ten feet, and the Hughli tides are strong, running at six or eight knots.

The task took time, and sunset came while yet the huge links hung perilously from the hawse pipes, creaking in long catenaries over the workers' heads.

As the sun's orb touched the western horizon, and the fretted outline of the city's towers and roofs took on the fairy, rose-red aspect of a city of the Arabian Nights, the chant of the muezzin rang out from the slender minarets of the mosques, calling the Faithful to prayer. The sound falls lightly on an alien ear, and our salt-hardened company heard it unheeding; yet the thin, sky-raining notes are very stuff of the Moslem East, inseparable from the turbaned flood of life between the Atlantic and the China seas. No bell may sound their summons; the human voice alone is worthy to call man to worship his Maker.

The labourers engaged in mooring the barque were all Moslems. As the call to worship rose and vibrated upon the evening air, a sudden hush fell

upon the hubbub they were making. They stopped work, as upon a given signal.

The halt was unexpected. The barque was riding to a coir spring; the clumsy punts veered dangerously in the strong tide; the slightest slip or surge of the cables would have sent them to the bottom and crushed a score of their occupants; yet, such disaster impendent notwithstanding, they ceased work suddenly and knelt down to pray!

In its high indifference to circumstance the action was superb. "Paradise," the Prophet said, "is under the shadow of swords." "This world no less so," their gesture seemed to proclaim, "yet has their annihilating stroke no terror for Believers."

The action deepened the hush that followed upon the medley of shrill cries, iron clank of links, and grind and roar of the fleeting cables. The hush seemed to spread across the breadth of the river, past the bathing ghats and the temple of Kali, through all the busy streets and alleys of the city. Moslems everywhere were turning their thoughts to prayer.

In the growing silence the workers on the punts bumping against our bows gathered to their devotions. Heedless of the demands of Western civilization, heedless of the utilitarian age in which they lived, of the unfinished work under their hand, they unrolled shreds and patches of prayer mats and, turning in the direction of Mecca, knelt down to pray. As one man, yet each unconscious of his neighbour, they began to perform the devotions incumbent, four times a day, upon all the children of Islam.

The great cables, hanging by coir runners, stirred and swung uneasily above their heads; the task of mooring trembled on completion; and their own danger from the clanking chains, swaying in the strong tide-rip, was not small—yet everything waited.

“ God is great,” so ran the holy words—

“ God is great !
There is no God but God !
I bear witness that Mohammed is the Prophet of God !
Come unto prayer !
Come unto salvation !
There is no other God but God ! ”

They ceased, and the air seemed to be filled with a faint, far-off murmur, like the whisper of innumerable voices, the brushing of innumerable wings. The western sky flushed crimson and gold, and the chastened city lifted a darker ridge against the pure sky of coming night. In the spiritual profundity of the moment it seemed all other sounds dwindled and were hushed. For a brief space the murmur thrilled on the ear with the instancy of an angel voice, then that, too, ceased, and all was still. In the deep pause one might have said that the whole world knelt at prayer.

It was imperishable, a marble moment. The high solemnity of it was gracious and uplifting, while they who were about to sleep commended their souls to Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps. The asperging hush soothed where it fell, sublimating the arrogant opulence of the surrounding City of Palaces, and enduing the barque with an air of almost sentient expectancy. It reached not only to the barges hanging precariously across the bows, and to the sampans tide-rode at the landing stage, but through all the city and country around, through all the bounds of Hindustan.

Nor stayed it there. Farther westward still, as the sun dipped to his rest, so, for believers, the hush and heartfelt prayer passed on. On Persian markets and Bedouin tents, by Afghan highlands and Anatolian plains, under the rose flush of an Egyptian

or a Syrian sky, through desert oases and in jungle clearings, the call and answering silence would descend. No halt nor check in that rolling flood of adoration until the barbaric towers of Morocco were reached, and lonely heights where old Atlas bathes his shoulders in the cooling floods of the Western Ocean.

A high tribute to the power that rules the world is this of the passing moment. It is but a moment, and then the hubbub breaks out again. Men rise from it, and turn to renewed toil, to pleasure, or to rest, their homage to their Maker paid.

Under the clipper's bows the worshippers rose to their feet, as across the breadth of Asia and of Africa they rose. The hum and clamour of the city asserted itself afresh; and, as the face of the broad stream became obscured and the stars gleamed out, the labourers turned to finish their task of securely mooring the vessel.

"God is God, and He is great,"—a simple and a striking formula, this call of a world to prayer. It impresses itself upon the imagination, and, hearing it, one grows unconsciously to murmur, in after wanderings around the unchanging East, whenever the hour of sunset comes and one watches its golden globe sink below the horizon, "Allah illah Allah, Allah ackbar!"

VALHALLA

ACROSS the meridians of the high Pacific, before a hard sou'-westerly gale, the barque was running under all six topsails. She was West Coast bound, and "making a passage," awash with green water fore and aft, taut as bar-iron in backstay and boltrope, and rolling rails under.

Jammed into a corner of the rail at the break of the poop I stood my watch. In common with all hands, my jacket was wet and my seaboots leaked, but the exhilaration of the running ship overcame such inconveniences, and I scanned the unquiet face of sea and sky lightheartedly. A drenching hail squall had just passed over, and, as it whistled away on the lee bow, I saw that the clew of the main t'gallant-sail had blown free and was ballooning out at the yardarm.

It needed to be restowed at once, or it would speedily flog itself adrift and be whipped into tatters, and I shouted to the hands, who were standing by under the fo'c'sle head, to make it fast.

One of the men, a round-shouldered, hump-backed Norwegian named Larsen, jumped into the rigging and laid aloft to secure the sail. He was a squat and powerful seaman, long-armed and hairy, not a little suggestive, in his well-lashed oilskins, of one of the misshapen trolls to be met with in the fairy stories of his native land.

The task did not take him more than a few minutes, and as he clambered down the rigging again, the vanguard of another heavy squall darkened the sky and began to scream in big hailstones about his

ears. A furious blast of wind struck the ship. Under the lash of it she yawed heavily, and a monstrous sea, tempest-winged, rose steeply to windward and bore down on her.

The Norwegian was on the point of swinging himself to the deck, when the crest of a roller behind him broke white to the fall. I saw his danger and shouted a quick warning :

“ Hang on there, Larsen ! ”

His hand was on the swifter, and he was in the act of swinging himself clear, when he heard the hail and paused, glancing over his shoulder. The comber was almost on top of him, and gave him no time to scramble back up the rigging. He did not attempt it, but twisted his legs round the backstay and hung on desperately.

It was no use. Strong man as he was, the breaking wave was mightier. The impetus of its rush plucked him from the rigging and buried him deep in its own volume. He vanished in the smother of foam that roared, rail high, across the decks. The main hatch was abreast of the rigging. There was no deckhouse in the way to check his rush—or smash him to a pulp—and over and above the hatch he was swept, tossed about like a chip in an eddy, to the far side of the deck.

For a moment's space, in the turmoil in the waist, I caught a glimpse of yellow oilskins and struggling limbs, then, to the following roll of the vessel, as the water sluiced back like a burst mill-dam, they disappeared.

Once again the hard-beset barque went under to her sheerpoles. She laboured heavily up and shook herself free, and her bowed trucks reeled back across the sky. As the long line of her rail appeared above water, and I saw a shapeless yellow object *outside* it, I did not for a moment grasp the dreadful significance of the fact.

But it was only for a moment. Then I realized, and, jumping to the rail to release a lifebuoy, in a voice that sounded even in my own ears unfamiliar, shouted :

“ Man overboard ! ”

Only the note of general doom—“ Fire ! ” or “ Breakers ahead ! ”—can be more terrible in a ship than that cry, and in instant response to it the men came dashing along from for’ard. The captain, alarmed by the tremendous lurches of the ship, had that moment come on deck.

In the wake of the men, the watch below, hatless, half-dressed, consternation in their looks, came scrambling aft. Impassable one would have called the main deck the minute before ; now, in answer to that call, the hands, indifferent to the risk to themselves, came clutching and stumbling along, sliding, splashing and wading recklessly through.

There was a shout of “ Quick, boys, the boat ! ” and we plunged, neck-deep, on to the main deck to cut the davit guys. The men flung themselves upon it, and in a handful of seconds the lashings had been cut through and the covers ripped off. What we hoped to do we never stopped to think. To get the boat over—to attempt in the first desperate fashion that came to hand—the rescue of the poor wretch upside was the impulse, impossible as a moment’s thought would have shown such a course to be.

The captain’s level voice steadied us. “ ‘Vast there ! ’ ” he shouted. “ Look out for yourselves ! ”

Another huge “ greybeard ” swung down on the ship, and we jumped for the poop ladder and the shelter of the rigging. As the sea broke in white uproar along the whole length of the rail, the men watched their chance to drop into the torrent and turn blindly to the work of rescue again. The effort was madness, but it was action, and action of some

sort, with that fateful cry in one's ears, seemed a demand as insistent as breathing.

As the sea passed, "Leave it! leave the boat!" O'Callaghan was shouting, his hand upon the weather braces. The men heard the words and paused, the habit of discipline strong upon them. The mate's arm, outflung passionately, pointed to another on-coming roller, and unwillingly, realizing the hand of fate against them, the men desisted. There was scant need for the captain's: "No good, men; no boat could live in this sea."

The truth of the words could not be gainsaid. It was obvious to every soul in our sea-drenched little company. The ship herself, if once she had broached to, would have been overwhelmed, burst in and sent to the bottom by that mighty following sea. No boat could have lived in it for two minutes, even could it have been safely launched. To touch a brace, or start tack or sheet, would no less have meant instant annihilation. There was, in bitter truth, no chance.

With a sickening of the heart I realized it. The men, too, willing as each one of them would have been to risk his own life, saw the hopelessness of the attempt and reluctantly stayed their hands.

While they still hesitated, there was a cry and an outstretched arm, and all eyes were turned astern. The ship was then squattering down in a trough, with an ominous shudder and crack in her topsail leaches. As her taffrail sank to the green depths of the hollow, there, on the slope of the next wave immediately behind, we saw the head and shoulders of a human form! Brief space had sufficed for the shout, the muster of men, and the rush to the boat, and Larsen was a bare thirty or forty yards astern of the ship.

He was, as I have said, an enormously strong man, and as he appeared in view, we saw that he was conscious, was, indeed, actually swimming after the ship. He had evidently been uninjured in his wild

career across the deck, and was now striking out doggedly in an endeavour to regain the barque.

It was a terrible realization : rather one could have wished that he had been killed outright. Human helplessness could not easily take a more pitiful shape. The barque was moving through the water at a full ten knots, driving before the risen gale, and every moment he was being left farther and farther astern. Yet he laboured on, breasting the broken surge gallantly.

Not a word was spoken. The air was full of tearing, shrieking, thunderous noise, yet deep in the ears of each one of us there seemed an utter silence. Like carved stones we stood. God ! I wished he would sink. Almost I thought I could hear his half-strangled hails as he blew the water aside. And still he struggled on.

His sou'-wester had gone, and he seemed to have kicked off his seaboots. Even in that extremity, the old Norse sea sense, the gift of a hundred generations of seafaring ancestors, had not deserted him. Nor had the old Norse indomitableness. Though pitiful, it was heroic too. One man matched against the mightiness of the sea—with single arm and sinew left to make head against it.

God knows it was a bitter struggle to watch : how much more bitter must it have been to wage ? Knowing that we could do nothing to save him, knowing that, come what might, the end was sure—how must the naked outline of the taffrail, reeling high aloft on the crest of a wave, have bitten into the fibres of his soul ? Yet with powerful strokes he swam on, contending to the last against fate.

One of the hands stumbled to the rail and, half mechanically, released the other lifebuoy. The action, kindly enough meant, was abject in its futility. Little would the buoy have availed Larsen, could he have reached it. It might have given him an hour

more of life, perhaps two, for he was a strong and stubborn-souled seaman; but that was all. There was bitter meaning in the mate's muttered: "You might ha' spared him that." He was then on the topmost crest of a roller, and as the ship dived swiftly into the trough, he vanished from sight.

A minute later, to the upward thrust of the bows, he became visible again, but farther away. He seemed to be still swimming, though in the white spume that surrounded and almost enveloped him, it was hard to say. Then the undulating edge of the next oncoming sea-range shut him from view.

Strained and silent, we awaited his reappearance, swaying to the motion of the ship, staring astern. The white face of Jimmy, the little cabin boy—discipline forgotten—peered round the corner of the companion way; the half-secured boat rocked dangerously in the chocks; and, relentlessly, under the Valkyr wings of the blast, the ship raced on, farther and farther from the doomed man.

Once more, as she shouldered a rise, we saw him. It was a fleeting glimpse, and a last one. It showed him still battling on, the dark circle of his head standing out from the snowy field of foam on the shoulders of a surging roller.

Then the barque swooped down, and when she rose again the long slopes astern were empty.

So the spirit of Larsen, A.B., went out on the dark. And the barque sped on, driving on wild pinions into the gulfs of the shelterless sea—the sea "that breakest for ever, that breakest, and never is broken."

LOMITAS

THE western seaboard of South America is a region dominated by one stupendous natural feature—the Andes. Those mighty wrinklins of the earth's crust, heaved up from the depths of the adjacent Pacific, have produced its peculiar climate, stored its islands with guano and its pampas with nitrate and precious metals, besides giving a distinctive character to its civilization in the past, and placing all sorts of obstacles in the way of the traveller to-day. The precipitous slopes and knife-like ridges of the Sierra, mightily carved and hewn with wind and sun and rain, give the land an unfinished air, as though one had come upon the tie-ribs and scaffolding of earth.

No seaboard in the world can be less susceptible to modification at the hand of man than the desolate coast between Coquimbo and Cabo Blanco. Harbours are few, streams of water fewer still, and vegetation non-existent. For years at a time rain never falls. As one comes in upon the coast it reveals itself as a rampart of naked rock, aboom with surf and alive with birds, running up into long slopes of sand and sun-scorched hills; with a hint of menace and of mystery brooding over the sombre sweep of its deserts.

The ports and harbours scattered along its length are in keeping with such a coast. The landing places would only be recognized as such by the artist in the matter of getting ashore. They bear scant resemblance to the more favoured Brightons and Broadstairs of our own coast. A lofty, iron-bound

shore, whose rocks rise sheer from the sea, or are scattered promiscuously off the narrow, treacherous beaches; a big swell that breaks interminably upon them in hoarse diapason; and an almost entire absence of river mouths and natural inlets, combine to make it difficult of approach everywhere, inaccessible in parts.

It was to one of the worst of such anchorages that the *Southern Cross* had come to load a cargo of guano. We had come up from the south, discharging our consignment of gunny bags at two score little ports from Valparaiso onwards, and thought we had become inured to indifferent landing places. "See one West Coast port," said sailors, "and you've seen the lot." Though a three-thousand mile rampart, running from the frozen fastnesses of the Horn to the sweltering jungles of Panama, cannot be dismissed quite so easily, there was a deal of truth in the saying. As far as drawbacks are concerned, West Coast ports have a unity in diversity. Junin is open to the southeasterly swell; Antofagasta has a dangerous bar; Mejillones a precipitous rock face; Valparaiso is subject to "northers"; Chanaral—we carried away poignant memories of what Chanaral was like.

We spent a week there, watering ship. Every morning at daybreak the gig had been sent away, with five men in her, and a large puncheon, bung uppermost, between the thwarts. The boat's crew had a two-mile pull in to the jetty, and, on arrival there, two men jumped ashore—literally jumped—to roll the casks down from the condensing station.

There was no fresh water in Chanaral, every gallon of it had to be condensed from sea-water. The employees at the station merely rolled the casks outside the door, and watched, with fine Hispanic unconcern, our perspiring men laboriously roll them over the half mile of rocky road to the landing place.

Arrived at the jetty, the real work commenced.

A length of canvas hose was passed ashore, one end of it being retained in the boat. Then the men on the pier, with the aid of a funnel, began slowly and carefully to empty the cask into their end of the hose, keeping a wary eye open for accidents. The man in charge cried "Pour!" and they poured, or "'Vast pouring!" and they frantically upended the cask, and looked to see what had happened.

In the boat two more men hung on to the mooring lines fore and aft. They dare not make them fast. The huge surf that rolled in and broke in thunder on the beach a few yards inshore of the boat forbade any relaxation of vigilance. With a single turn round the thwarts, they hung on, easing and checking the lines to the lift and fall of the boat. One moment she would be level with the top of the pier; the next, with a sensation as though one's stomach were coming up through one's teeth, she would wallow a full thirty feet below it.

Of course, a plentiful proportion of the water was lost. With a vicious 'scend, the boat would be urged forward; the end of the hose would be plucked out of the puncheon and waver its stream of water wildly in the air, and the boat's crew would curse vociferously. It was back-breaking and exasperating work. Two trips per day were all that could be made, and it was always well after dark ere we hoisted the boat to the davits and knocked off work, malignantly wrenched and scorched.

But Lomitas was worse. We called the place "Lomitas," though I have never seen the name marked on any map or chart, and the word simply means "the rocky hillocks." It lies on the coast of Peru between Islay and Pisco, with no human habitation within fifty miles of it.

We made the anchorage late one afternoon. As we sailed slowly into the mouth of the shallow, rock-littered bay, we saw a barque at anchor off the

promontory that forms its southern extremity. She was rust-stained and deeply loaded, her sails were bent, and she was rolling gunnels under. We let go our anchor a cable's length from her, and that evening her captain came on board. He said he was sailing on the morrow, and he said it in a tone of passionate thankfulness. He gave the place a reputation that the foreshore of Hades must come short of. Almost unbroken bad weather, which made them constantly desist from the work of loading; two months of endless rolling that threatened to dip their yard-arms; a shortage of provisions and fresh water; and the mere boredom of existence in such a place had reduced the *Corryvreckan's* commander to an almost inarticulate disgust. He informed us that a German barque which had left shortly after he arrived had met with more definite ill-luck. When lifting her anchor, the swell had thrown such a strain on the cables that a windlass pawl broke, and one man had been killed and two others injured.

The appearance of the place bore him out. On one side of the bay a mountainous headland fell in a blank wall to the sea. All round its base were a maze of sunken rocks, over which the sea broke white. With admirable propriety the Spaniards call them "Los Infiernillos." On the other side was a lower promontory with a flat top, which had for æons been the haunt of sea-birds and was covered with the guano we had come to load. The narrow beach in the curve of the bay between these two points was circumscribed by black mountains, and boasted a collection of huts and tents, where lived the temporary population—not a hundred souls in all. The roadstead was entirely open, and the swell on the beach unremitting and enormous. Landing there was out of the question; the line of breakers seething and spouting through the rocks being utterly impassable. To overcome the natural difficulties of the place and open up com-

munication between the ships and the shore an ingenious arrangement had been devised.

On the top of the small headland a wooden platform had been erected. From it two long steel hawsers, with anchors at their extremities, had been moored out to sea. The hawsers were of immense length, and did not cut the water until they were a full two hundred yards from the rocks at the base of the promontory. On these two hawsers an endless fall, fitted with travelling blocks, had been set up, and was worked by a winch on the wooden platform. From the great height to which they were secured, the hawsers hung in a long catenary and swung uneasily to the onset of the shoreward-rushing rollers.

When it was necessary to load the surf boats (lighters were ruled out at Lomitas), they were made fast under the hawsers just where the wires cut the water. The bags of guano, attached to one of the travelling blocks, were then pushed off the platform and came hurtling down the wire, fetching up in the bottom of the boat with a hearty thud. As they came rushing down, their weight sent the empty bags, fast to the lower travelling block, rushing up the other wire from the surf boat.

Such was the method of loading guano, and such, we learnt to our cost, was the sole means of communication with the shore.

A day or two after our arrival Captain Pettigrew went ashore on business with the chief stevedore. He made no comment on the amenities of the place when he returned, but a week later, when it was again necessary to see the headman about accommodating the lancheros on board, he sent me in his place. I was only too delighted to have an opportunity of stretching my legs—until I saw the means by which alone terra firma could be reached, and incidentally why the captain had preferred to send a deputy.

I was pulled in to one of the surf boats that was

then lying under the hawsers, and scrambled on board. I had not the slightest idea of how I was going to land, and still was happily ignorant of it when one of the lancheros approached me with a cargo sling in his hand and a disarming smile on his face. He signed to me to put one foot in the bight of the sling and, when I had done so, hitched the other end over the hook of the block.

Then I realized! Instead of the empty sacks it was I who was going to be shot skywards when the loaded bags were pushed off the elevated platform. I should like to have refused, but saw no alternative way of getting ashore. The lanchero was grinning amiably, so, with a feeling that I had joined a suicide club and drawn the ace, I grasped the rope above my head, and breathed a good-bye "Bueno, hombre!" to the lanchero.

The fellow signalled to one of the men on the platform above. I saw a waving of arms high up in the blue, and heard a faint shout borne down to me. Then they must have pushed off the loaded bags.

I shot skywards like a rocket. The sensation was horrible. The grinning lanchero, the surf boat, the very face of the ocean seemed to collapse and hurtle downwards. To the whirr and screech of the hank on the wire I soared up into the blue air, robbed almost of breath, but hanging on to the bight of the sling like a bull-dog to a bone.

I went up, as the saying is, like a bird, or, to be more truthful, like a bundle of bags. Straight up, with the speed of a rocket bound for the stars, and hit the platform—no!

The strops were so adjusted that the loaded bags hit the bottom of the boat first, while I came to an abrupt standstill, swinging violently, a few yards from the platform. There suddenly I stopped, swaying like a paper man in a gale of wind, with the platform out of reach, and the rocks, with the inaudible

surf crawling over them, a hundred and fifty feet below.

It was the unpleasantest moment of the whole affair. For a few seconds I oscillated like Mahomet's coffin between heaven and earth, then the men on the platform reached over, grasped the line, and hauled me up by strength of arm. A powerful hand clutched me by the collar, and I was dragged bodily on to that blessed haven of rest, the platform.

The passage perilous was over. Thenceforward progress was awkward, but less like that of a projectile fired from a gun. The security of the platform was purely a comparative affair. It was a crazy skeleton of a structure, and a fresh breeze, or even the sag and drag of the wire hawsers, caused it to shake and sway ominously. Not till one got on the rocky top of the headland, could one draw breath and offer grateful thanks to the gods of air that one was ashore.

Such was landing at Lomitas; and I had the frequent experience of so cavalierly entering Peru. Having made the trial once, the captain declined making a second venture, and always made me his deputy when it was necessary to do business with the people ashore. As he was nearing sixty, one could hardly blame him. For my own part, I put to proof the truth of the axiom that practice makes perfect; and before we sailed learnt to go up as nonchalantly as a sack of guano myself.

LANDFALL

HER voyage almost completed, the *Southern Cross* was nearing home. "Snow and blow," for the season was mid-winter, had followed us from the Western Isles. On the edge of soundings a lucky cast with the lead brought up fine sand and hakes' teeth, and established our position as somewhere off the Scillies.

Then the weather closed in thick, but later, a rift in the whirling wrack revealed a glimpse of a light vessel to port. It proved to be the Coningbeg Lightship, off the Saltees Islands, and all day the barque coasted along the rugged Irish shore, standing away, as night set in and a thick drizzling rain began to fall, on a long slant to the Welsh coast.

All through the night a grey blanket of mist shut us in, and a raw searching wind streaked the seas with white and penetrated to the marrow of one's bones. It was right Channel weather, a typical clipper homecoming.

It was my watch below next morning, and at seven bells Maurice came to call me. His lips were blue and his oilskin-clad figure was dripping wet, but there was a happy light in his eyes.

"Seven bells, sir," said he, "land's in sight!"

I inquired as to the "when" and "where."

"Just at daybreak," was the answer. "The Skerries, right ahead. . . . Jolly lucky landfall, sir. . . . We'll be in Liverpool before night."

I climbed out of my bunk and began to don my moist clothes. The Skerries, the north-west point

of Anglesey—a lucky landfall, indeed! Forty miles to the Bar Light, and a straight run in. Maurice was right; we should be in before dark. I hurried up on deck to relieve the mate.

It was a thick, grey, sodden morning, raining heavily out of a low sky, with an atmosphere the colour of pea soup, and an area of visibility of at most a couple of miles. The yards had been squared when the land was sighted, and, with the crojick rolled up and the weather clew of the mainsail lifted, the barque was driving forward questingly into the eddying wreaths of mist.

O'Callaghan and I stood together by the rail for a few moments, silent for the most part, keeping a sharp watch for vessels bound out from the Mersey.

The rain fell heavily, and the mist showed no signs of lifting. Little "Peggy" Evans, who had been up making fast the gaff topsail, swung himself down the rigging. As he came abreast of where we were standing he pointed away to a point on the bow.

"There are the good old Welsh hills, sir," said he, a cheerful ring in his voice. Carnarvon was his home town.

"The Welsh what?" shouted the mate, jumping to the corner of the poop rail. With the Skerries astern, the land, if visible anywhere, should have been abeam, not ahead.

We peered ahead intently. Through the drifting mists and banks of vapour we could make out a darker greyness, a more stationary patch of yellow cloud. Land! Lead-coloured and unreal though it looked, it was land indisputably, a thin grey pencilling full ahead and reaching out on either bow. Whatever it was that had been sighted before, it was not the Skerries!

We saw it simultaneously, and simultaneously we turned in a shout of warning to the helmsman: "Down helm! down!"

The mate rushed to bear a hand at the spokes, yelling to me over his shoulder to "Let go the port braces!" As I jumped to carry out the order, the captain hurried on deck, while from for'ard the men came running.

The great yards swung. Let fly all together, the braces whirled through the sheaves, as the men tallied on and hauled with their last ounce of strength.

The wake curved out on the quarter. Swiftly the barque came to, sweeping across the tumbling seas in a wide, circling movement. A long sweep, a pause, and then another long sweep and check. The wind, only a moderate breeze when right aft, now screamed and whistled through the rigging, bearing the ship down as she yawed heavily into it. The sails were ramping full, and the barque's decks canted to a sharp angle that made one lay a steadying hand on belaying pin and backstay.

As the barque rounded to, driven relentlessly up into the wind by the helm and the bellying foot of the spanker, the spindrift flew in sheets across the deck. A toppling green sea, rearing above the rail, fell aboard and filled the deck waist high. It swept me off my feet, and seethed down on the men, flinging them heavily against the rail. No one heeded it, but continued to haul as they scrambled to their feet, spitting the water from their mouths. Succeeding seas crashed aboard, tumbling in anyhow as our broadside lay clear to their onrush.

The noise was tremendous. The heavy grinding of the yards, the flap and thunderous filling of the wet sails, the thrashing of blocks and sheets, and the hoarse shouting of the men at the ropes, mingled confusedly with the roar of the wind and the sea.

As the weather leaches lifted, the helmsman eased the wheel to the captain's warning: "Check her! steady at that!" With the lower yards well for'ard, we hauled taut the royal and t'gallant braces, and,

as we did so, another sound became audible. Glancing to leeward, over the half-submerged lee rail, we saw the reason of it.

Not far distant, startlingly close indeed, black cliffs loomed out, iron-bound and sombre. At their base lay a white strip of leaping foam, a broad band of angry water curling and spouting over the half-seen rocks, where the surf waged its endless warfare with the land. The land ended in a lofty cape, only a point or two on the bow. Could we weather it? Already the roar of the breakers was in our ears.

I saw the captain nod towards them. "The Skerries!" he shouted to the mate. "The other . . . the South Stack!" Then we realized what had happened! The South Stack marks the north-western extremity of Holy Island, the Skerries the north-western extremity of Anglesey. When the course had been altered, instead of standing in as we imagined, along the north shore of Wales, we were heading straight in for the western cliffs of Anglesey. Now, set far in as we were, could we weather the island?

The ship was boring into it. She drove her bows deep to the press of sail she was staggering under and stood up gallantly against the landward-rushing seas, which rose in curling crests and raced for the rocks almost under our lee.

Close aboard the land appeared, perilously close, and reached out as though determined to entrap us. The barque, held rigidly close to the wind, rose and fell in her attempts to claw to windward. One might have fancied she knew the danger and was putting forth all her strength to avert it. To give her the better chance, we boarded the main tack and hoisted the fore topmast staysail.

With the skipper at his elbow, the helmsman kept the sails clean full. Fowler was at the wheel, and never had he steered better. He handled the stubborn

kicking spokes with the ease of steady nerves and steel sinews. It needed strength and judgment at the helm just then, for to have let her gripe would have been to have lost some of the driving power that was our only hope.

Momentarily the weather was clearing and the wind rising. Plain and ominous to leeward now lay the rock-staked coast. The wind howled down on us from seaward in high-drawn and increasing blasts. We cast anxious glances aloft to see how sheets and canvas stood the strain. If anything carried away now, it meant an end to the barque and "good night" to all on board.

But the good gear held. The *Southern Cross* had a queer streak in her character, but to fail at a critical moment was not in her. She lay over at an appalling angle, every stitch and cloth aloft hummed under the terrible pressure, and each tense rope and shroud gave off its own high-drawn note of agony. One might have stood on the bellying curve of the mainsail; had it been carved in stone it could not have been more iron-hard.

For a few minutes our fate hung in the balance. The barque seemed to be gaining, yet the upshot was on the knees of the gods. The captain stood by the compass, watching the bearing of the point. From the top of the deckhouse I watched it too. The bearing was changing; that was certain. But was it changing quickly enough? I glanced at the intervening water space; it was not a cable's length wide.

Now or never: ten seconds would decide. I stayed my hand on the ladder, and stared at the point. The barque was tearing through the water like a frightened horse, almost in the backwash of the breakers. Before my foot had touched the next rung, the crisis was over.

Even as I looked, the point drew swiftly abeam, and open sea lay ahead. Weathered, but by inches!

I saw the captain move away from the helm, and the men relax their attitudes of tense expectation. I jumped down to the deck with a perceptible relaxing of my own muscles. We had lived a long time in the last quarter of an hour.

A few minutes later we were out of danger, and the barque was steering more easily to the northward, with the hungry Skerries, the red-barred tower of which was now plainly visible, dwindling astern.

A pilot boarded us off Point Lynas, and we picked up a tug on the look-out for homeward-bounders. With her hawser fast on board, we clewed up and made fast with all haste. The familiar Bar Light-vessel was passed, riding solitarily on the pale-green flood, and, as the short January day drew to a close, we let go our anchor in the Mersey, over by the Wallasey shore, and with the lights of home all round us.

“THE PORTS DESIRED”:
UMGENI RIVER

“ THE PORTS DESIRED ” : UMGENI RIVER

WINDJAMMER men suffered many limitations, but they had advantages too. The dictum of the poet, that “ the garden of the world is a prison to the penniless,” did not apply to them. For ever on the move, in Rio in the spring and Shanghai in the autumn, there was a large leisureliness about their going to and fro in the earth that made for enjoyment. The steamboat sailor calls at more ports, but his visits are brief and hurried. The long-term resident, knowing one stony corner of the earth to satiety, loses his sense of perspective; the moneyed globe-trotter sees what he is intended to see, and rarely gets beyond the beaten track. But the clipper seaman, whether he took advantage of it or not, was given a better opportunity of discovering new worlds in the ports he visited than any of the others.

Perhaps the mere contrast from the bleak severity of shipboard life to the smiling green luxuriance of earth made half the charm of such landfalls. The sea is a stubborn tilth to plough, and most lands are gracious by comparison. Ports were welcome interludes in the serious business of existence, and one unconsciously stored up a sheaf of pleasant memories of such.

The havens of South Africa are not more richly endowed by nature than half a hundred other ports whither trading keels ply. Yet those same ports seen at sunset from the offing become havens that the blessed might desire to reach. No less than that

Durban appeared to us, the night we took our departure from the Bluff.

Over the landward horizon, in the wake of the setting sun, stretched a narrow belt of black cloud. On its lower edge was faintly visible the grey pencilling of the land. As the sun sank beyond it in the farthest west, the sky slowly turned a field of blazing gold, and dark cloud and hidden land alike ran in a long ensanguined stream of light, ebbing and flooding, changing from gules to crimson, to charred embers and dull rust, before finally dying away altogether in the deepening gulf of night. Lost youth never looked more beautiful to old age, than that bustling modern seaport did then to us.

Such was our parting glimpse of Africa; our first had been less imaginatively wonderful. As we warped in to the quay, we were welcomed, in letters a yard high, by a huge advertisement for somebody's whisky, embellishing the gable end of a building and identical with those we had seen decorating the hoardings of the East End of London three months previously. Such intimate touches annihilate distance; and that cheerful poster, still going strong in far-off Natal, brought England very near.

It soon receded. The air of sameness which civilization gives to places a world's width apart is only skin deep. One soon pierces beneath. And in Durban, with its mixture of black and white and brown and yellow humanity, more easily than in most. The horned and feathered rickshaw-men, the native policemen, the semi-tropical vegetation, the strange birds and fish, the still stranger swarms of insect life, the curio shops where one might buy knobkerries, assegais, cooking pots, necklaces and atrocious slips of steel for letting the life out of a man's body—Arab trophies, these last—were all avenues one had only to follow up to adventure into a new land.

The kaleidoscope in the streets was fascinating to watch. Natives predominate, and your South African native, the Zulu particularly, is a likeable fellow. The task of discharging us was being carried out by Zulus, and a brawny, light-hearted lot they were. They knocked one another and the cargo about with the utmost cheerfulness and impartiality. Their toughness was amazing, and if they lacked the dexterous ease and coolness of a Thames or Mersey-side stevedore, they worked with a hilarious vigour which was no bad substitute.

Most of them were up-country Zulus, and they came down to Durban under their own chiefs to work on board the ships for six months in the year, returning to their kraals for the remaining six for an orgy of idleness and beer-drinking with the money they had earned. They lived in temporary kraals run up on the outskirts of the town, and in many cases were accompanied with their women-folk.

The women of one tribe have a curious method of dressing their hair. When they are married they build a low ring or wall of mud all round the top of their skulls, and train the hair up through it. The mud dries and the coiffure becomes permanent. Each succeeding year another ring is added to the first, the interlacing hair binding it all together into a firm tower of hard mud. Many of these curious adornments are a foot or more in height. They are never removed, and must prove highly uncomfortable when their wearer lies down to sleep. To meet the exigencies of slumber their pillows are rests of hard wood, upon which they do not lay their heads but merely support their necks.

The amusements of the men, as befits a warrior race and the offspring of Chaka's spearmen, were rough and brutal. A kind of singlestick fighting seemed to be their favourite pastime. They indulged in it at night, after a hard day's work, by the light

of torches. Two men stood facing one another, each with his right foot foremost, just touching that of his opponent. In their right hands they held heavy bludgeons of iron bark, with which to thwack each other about the heads.

At a signal given they laid on lustily. There was no feinting and very little parrying. They smote each other about the head and shoulders; the idea seeming to be—like Wellington's at Waterloo—who could stand pounding the longest. At a more than usually heavy blow, the spectators would stamp their feet and shout "Shire!"—the Zulu word for "strike" or "blow." The strength of the combatants was prodigious, and in spite of the thickness of their skulls, the blood was usually trickling down their faces in thick rivulets after a few minutes' play.

In their own kraals they seem to indulge in combats more dangerous still. Many of the men employed on board us were scarred with wounds that had evidently been inflicted with steel weapons. The headman of the gang was a pure-blooded Zulu and a chief of some sort. The customs officer—himself an old soldier—told me he was one of Cetewayo's men, and quite a notability in his way. He was a grey-haired old veteran, with a sparse beard and a frightful gash across the abdomen, which looked as though it had been inflicted with an assegai—or perhaps it was a bayonet!

Among African warriors the Zulus rank high. Their impis almost did "eat up" south-east Africa at the height of their power, and more than once they gave Briton and Boer a hard tussle to master them. Had they been able to oppose more than spears and shields to rifles and Gatling guns, it would have been harder still. Under their ruthless military code it was death or victory for every soldier who took the field, and the fact gave a grim propriety to

their famous marching song, glorious in its pagan fatalism :

“ If we go forward we die,
If we go backward we die,
Better go forward and die.”

In common with most negro races, their insensibility to pain and their disregard of death is surprising. I watched a steamer discharging a cargo of coal at the same wharf as that at which we were lying. The bags were lifted out of her by a crane, in slings of twenty at a time, and swung ashore into coal trucks on the quay.

A gang of Zulus were working on the wharf, and as one two-ton sling was coming ashore, the rope parted and the whole lot fell from a height of thirty feet full on top of one unfortunate man. He was crushed to a pulp.

Did the others blanch at this terrible accident befalling one of their number in their very midst? Not they! They shrieked with delight, seizing one another by the arm and gesticulating in their uncontrollable merriment. They danced round, dipping their fingers in the blood, and behaving like mannerless boys when an old gentleman slips on a greasy pavement. Of surprise, sympathy or dismay, they showed not a trace.

Not until the foreman, a West Indian nigger, and himself as black as the ace of spades, came along and cursed them for a “ lot ob black sons ob Satan,” did they turn to and haul the coal bags off their mangled comrade. And even then they stopped occasionally to give free vent to their robustly-constituted sense of humour, when some particularly gruesome fragment came to light.

Obviously negroes are of another fibre to men of white race—of tougher physique and less feeling. On a later occasion, in Port of Spain, we were discharging

heavy iron girders into a lighter alongside. There was a choppy sea running and the lighter was bumping heavily against the ship's side. As one of the girders was being swung outboard, it took charge, nipping the hand of one of the men working in the lighter against the bulwarks, and taking off all four fingers as neatly as a surgical operation could have done.

I saw the accident, and hailed the boatmen to bring him on board. The injured man stood stupidly gazing at the stump, from which the blood was spouting, but when he heard my hail, he laid hold of a rope hanging over the ship's side, and swarmed up it hand over hand, mutilation and all! It amazed me to see he could do it. No white man, I am sure, is so insensible to pain—or so indifferent to it—as to swarm twenty feet up a rope with one hand a mere bleeding stump. I bound it up, and he went off home in a lighter returning ashore, quite contentedly.

Negroes have their gifts, as Natty Bumppo would say, and I confess to a strong liking for them. In Durban I made an excursion with a couple of natives out to the Bluff on a monkey-snaring expedition. It was a trifle disreputable, perhaps, but very interesting, nevertheless. Monkeys were not the only game my companions were after, they were ardent coleopterists as well, and collected a species of winged locusts very plentiful in the neighbourhood of Durban. A branch of a tree and a lamp comprised their outfit. The *modus operandi* was simply this. After dark the lamp was hung in a tree. The light attracted the insects, which were then knocked down in shoals by the lustily swung branches. The catch was then collected and pounded up into a thick paste, to be retailed, I understood, for Kaffir consumption. I only hope it was confined to that.

On another occasion—in different company—I rode out with two more of our company to the Umgeni.

Our host was the ship's stevedore, and we were sitting out on the stoep of his bungalow on the Berea when he asked us. Fresh from the Spartan routine of life on board, we had succumbed to the fascination of Africa and accepted with alacrity. The cheroots were good, and the coffee was a luxury. The wine-dark sky and large glitter of the night spread out overhead; the refreshing sea breeze, rustling in the many leaves, brought with it a murmur of shelly sound; and away and afar-off, the grey gleam of the Indian Ocean, a-chafe against its ancient banks, shimmered like a fallen scimitar. Much less would have been enough to have made seamen in love with that broad continent beneath the southern stars.

And the ride furthered the fascination. The way lay over a fine rolling country, richly wooded and very delightful to eyes accustomed to grey plains of sea.

We headed north, crossing the Umgeni River, and coming at length to low ground by the sea, where it was necessary to steer one's way carefully through the swamps. We pulled up at a rough bungalow, built on the edge of a little lagoon, with only reed-covered marsh and sand dunes between it and the sea.

Two men—friends of our host—had made it their home. It was remote from all the amenities of civilization, and an ideal spot for those who were Gallios in the appreciation of such things. Our hosts were leading the simple life, and their matter of fact recital of its joys made it seem that one might profitably abandon such a stern mistress as the sea for it light-heartedly.

That evening we went down to the beach for a bathe. Dusk came on while we were out, and vividly I remember the eerie beauty of our leisurely walk back.

It was an evening of pearl and grey. The sun had set behind high ridges of land rolling away into

the dim heart of Africa, and a soft breeze blew in from the sea, souging gently in the reeds and ruffling the surface of the silent dunes and tufts of sea-grass. Grey was the sea and the salt pools; grey the illimitable sky; and grey the sighing reeds and stretches of untrodden sand. The moon rose later, pouring a flood of light on the silvery-hued ocean, and picking out in pearl and ivory the shadowy contours of the landscape.

The wonder of it was haunting—more so than many a more striking display of light and colour. There was none of the unearthly splendour of a Cairene moon in summer, when minarets and domes stand out upon the velvet night like frosted blades and bubbles that a breath would shatter, and the Nile is a flowing bowl of quicksilver. But there was something deeper, a hint of silence, vastness and mystery, an emanation from the hidden heart of Africa.

Though less inscrutable now than of old, with its peoples policed and its leagues apportioned, Africa still fires the imagination. Its gigantic, outstretched bulk of desert, forest and veldt, is the true Colossus of the world, drowsing in the heat of the sun, with Atlantean shoulders in Morocco, forest-clad girth on the Congo, and huge foot disturbing the flow of the Southern Ocean.

A giant, do I say? More truly might Africa be called a woman, a woman naked and unashamed. Her emblem should be a mother, nude, black, thick-lipped, full-breasted, her baby in her arms. Not for easily dismissed reasons are multitudes of her children worshippers of the generative powers of nature. The exuberant heat of her climate, the fecundity of beast and bird and creeping life, the unblushing obviousness of Nature's plan of male and female broad upon her fields and plains, these things are the potencies of Africa and make her the womb of the world.

The voice of her plenitude sounded in our ears that night, as we lay out on the stoep rolled up in a blanket apiece. Only a dozen miles from civilization, the primeval night with all its stars rolled over our heads, and the primeval ocean, licking at its ragged fringe, echoed hoarsely in our ears. As far as solitude and untroubled quiet could persuade us, we might have been in the Mountains of the Moon, and the first men who ever penetrated their depths.

Lying out under the broad sky, all Africa seemed to unroll before me. Borne on and on, I dreamed of the hills visioned at sunset; of beyond; of vast reed-shaken meres; of toppling mountains, and of endless long leagues of hot grass and clammy forest. I saw hawk-faced Arabs, yellowy Portuguese, and glistening ebony natives, kraals, caves and cities. And through it all passed endlessly the swinging gait of many women, bare-armed, brass-ringed, with slender grass girdles and heavy, rounded thighs. How different it all was from shipboard slumbers, where one dreams merely of a rough shaking and a reiterated “One bell, sir!” and wakes to find the hateful dream a still more damnable reality.

We turned out at sun-up, when the first beams of “old Jamaica” shone redly through the level mists of morning, and the crickets began to stir in the grass. The long hours before us were spent in the inevitable fashion—swimming, shooting, fishing, and cruising in a little skiff our hosts kept moored in the reeds.

The long waves of the Indian Ocean were rolling in in rainbow-tinted crests, strewing the beach with shells and sea-urchins, and leaving behind tufts and waving tendrils of weed in the scattered tidal pools. The coast was deserted. There was no sail, nor vestige of smoke, on the seaward horizon. The loneliness was profound. The primal solitude of the surroundings made it easy to picture that pregnant moment of the past, when the estuary of

the Umgeni enjoyed its "crowded hour of glorious life" and added its few lines to the illuminated manuscript of history.

Had there been a watcher in the reeds, like ourselves, one January day of the year 1498, what an unlooked-for sight he would have seen! Four stumpy and high-sided ships, with unhandy sails flapping in the breeze, and bluff bows smacking against the waves, going about off the river's mouth. None of the four much bigger than a 'Thames' barge, with salt-stained hulls and well-lashed guns, their appearance in those seas was more portentous than their size. For the little squadron a-tumble in the offing represented the junction of East and West, and was Vasco da Gama's India-bound fleet.

His four ships were the advance guard of Europeans in the East, and the first keels of any sort that had visited the virgin coast of Africa between Mossel Bay and Mozambique—the farthest point attained by Diaz, and the most southerly trading post of Arab seafarers, two thousand miles apart.

Da Gama had come up from the south and anchored in Natal Roads. One of the ships of his little squadron parted her cable and was in danger of driving ashore in the estuary. To succour her the fleet weighed again, and off the Umgeni's mouth went about and stood out to sea.

From the open coast we pulled round into the river, and rowed leisurely along. The lotus peace of the afternoon penetrated deep. The Umgeni is an unexacting stream. The sun shone down sleepily hot, and the busy wharves of Durban seemed very far away. Far ahead a range of hills beckoned us on; overside the musical lapping of the water urged us to set about it easily.

Surely a river is among the most gracious of the works of God? Without it, the fairest landscape would be desert and intolerable, in fancy as well as

in fact. It renders brown earth habitable, and adds thereto the first highway across its surface. Imagine the Argentine without the Plate, or Burma without the Irrawaddy. Where would be the mangrove swamps and rice-fields, the fireflies and moist heat, the carved and high-sterned junks and tinkle and glitter of tall *htees*? All gone, and they *are* Burma.

So Egypt is the Nile, and Venezuela the Orinoco, and whatso is not the Nile or the Orinoco is but a few sand-blown leagues of the Sahara, or the name for a region of hearsay and fable. A river with four heads, we are told, flowed through Eden, and made Paradise possible. There is—there must be—a river whose streams make glad the city of God. The perfection of beauty would be incomplete without it.

So, though the Umgeni is an unpretentious stream, and we a mere crowd of sailormen, its opening served us as an inlet to Africa, leading our feet in the wake of our imaginings and adding to the number of our desired havens. Can the most favoured voyagers travel a more royal road, or reach a happier destination?

THE ISLAND OF ASCENSION

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REMOTE and lonely amid the wastes of the South Atlantic, roughly equidistant from both America and Africa, lies the little island of Ascension. The nearest land is Cape Palmas on the coast of Guinea to the nor'-nor'-east; almost due west lies Cape San Roque; while to the east, slightly more distant, is the mouth of the Congo River. "A thousand miles from anywhere" would not be an inapt description of its locality; and it derives no small part of its interest from the mere fact of its isolation.

It lies, it is true, on the highway of ships bound to the Cape of Good Hope and beyond; and, in the era of the old East Indiamen, was perhaps more important as a port of call than it is now. Outward-bounders occasionally sighted it in those leisurely days when an eastern crossing of the Equator was considered more desirable than it is at present, or than it was in the hey-day of the clippers. Its fantastic ridge, black and ragged on the skyline under the roaring blue of the Trades, was then a familiar sight to flying-fish seamen, bound out to Bombay or the Sandheads.

We raised the island one evening at sunset—a ridge of ashen grey spikes along the skyline, dominated by one loftier than the rest, and looking like a fairy castle in the translucent air of evening. As we approached, its outline hardened, changing to a jetty black, where it gleamed with an unearthly distinctness for a few minutes against the pale

emerald of the sky, before being swallowed up in the deepening shades of night.

We stood on under easy sail through the hours of darkness, and next morning found ourselves to the south-west of the island, when we hauled up and shaped a course for the anchorage. The only harbour the island affords is in Sandy or Clarence Bay, on the north-west side of the island. It has to be approached carefully, in consequence of foul ground to the southward.

We kept a good offing until we opened out the houses of the little town, picturesquely situated on the slopes of a hill at the extremity of the shallow bay, then stood boldly in and came to an anchor in about four and a half fathoms of water.

Ascension is an interesting scrap of land to visit. Roughly elliptical in shape, it has an area of less than forty square miles, and is surrounded on all sides by deep water. Round three parts of its circumference black cliffs fall sheer to the sea, with never an anchorage or landing-place from North Point round to Southwest Bay. An inhospitable, iron-bound coast it is, battlemented with toppling crags and pierced with narrow, gloomy ravines. In the lee of the island a narrow tongue of submerged land stretches seaward, like the tail of a comet, formed by the wind-strewn dust and sand and detritus that, through the ages, has been blown to leeward by the trade-wind, and built up the only anchorage the place possesses.

The starkly-bare little island is but a volcanic fragment heaved up from the depths of the sea. All down the centre of the South Atlantic is a submarine ledge, separated by much greater profundities from the mainlands of Africa and America. Ascension is a mountain crest of that ridge—so, too, is Saint Helena—breaking its way through the surface of the sea from its deeply submerged platform. Its origin is

evident in its appearance. It has a rough, black, broken surface, composed for the most part of ancient lava beds, which, here and there, through the slow disintegration of the ages and the work of the weather, have been worn soft and friable, allowing little patches of vegetation to spring up. Its surface is a mass of peaks and ridges. There are the craters of no less than forty extinct volcanoes jumbled together within its circuit, and their grotesque outlines, and the mingled ash-and-soot-colour of their clinker-like rocks, give it from seaward a stern and forbidding appearance.

On closer acquaintance the island proves to be not quite so sterile, and the summit of the highest peak, Green Mountain, nearly three thousand feet above sea-level, is covered with vegetation and looks a pleasant, skyey, wind-blown spot. There is some sort of vegetation, too, sparse and scattered, on the hill-sides and at the bottom of the ravines. The climate is healthy, thanks to the influence of the trade-wind. The island is full in the sweep of the south-east trades, and those good breezes blow all the year round, with a salt, invigorating impetuosity that keeps the air dry and salubrious. It is blazing hot in Georgetown, of course, which is sheltered from the winds and only just above sea-level, but on the windier uplands the climate is beautiful. The temperature of the lower slopes of Green Mountain varies very little, and is always about ten degrees below that of the capital.

In common with other islands of the South Atlantic—Trinidad, Fernando Noronha and the rest—Ascension is visited by those curious phenomena called the Rollers. They occur at all seasons of the year, but are most frequent from December to April. What causes them has never been definitely ascertained. Submarine volcanoes, earthquakes occurring in the neighbourhood of the seismic region of the

Equator, the reflux of the waters heaped up by the trade-wind, have all been advanced as possible causes. But the most likely explanation of their origin seems to be that they are the result of distant storms, occurring in the Equatorial seas outside the region of the trade-winds. Their onset is always upon the lee side of the island, from a more or less westerly direction, and they roll in upon the island beaches with a weight and volume that makes landing temporarily out of the question and affords a spectacle of terrific grandeur.

Their approach is unheralded; and all the more remarkable from the very uncertainty and absence of warning of its occurrence. The sea will be calm, the trade-wind steady, sky and barometer alike not indicative of any change, when a watery ridge will be observed out at sea, moving towards the land—slowly at first, but gathering momentum as it progresses. Far-stretching and irresistible it comes on, a rushing mountain-wall of water sweeping over the face of ocean, as a ripple traverses a duck-pond. As it nears the coast and encounters the friction of the bottom, it rises higher, with an overbalancing crest; its speed increases, and with a thunderous roar, it bursts upon the beach, flinging itself high in clouds of iridescent spray, and shaking the solid earth beneath the fury of its impact.

The first roller is followed by another, and another, and another; each rising above its predecessor, surging onwards with a toppling concave crest, and smiting the shores and hollow rocks with a deep resounding boom. The receding waters of the broken roller fall back and meet the oncoming rush of the next wave in Titan combat; bringing down the advancing curling ridge in a cataclysmic roar of sound and a furious turmoil of broken foam. So it goes on—a mighty uproar of rolling crests, seething water, sound, colour and fury indescribable.

The contrast between that warring line of surf and the deep quietude of the surrounding face of ocean is most striking. The calmness of sky and sea, warm, sunlit and breezy, unvexed throughout its vast expanse save by those strange breakers, which seem urged on by some invisible and relentless force, makes a wonderful and magnificent sight. The intense sunshine sleeps on the iron rocks and on the still sea. In the blazing fervour of the tropic day everything is at peace, everything drowns, save close inshore, where the rollers, in a long continuous wall, creamy with foam and alight with spray, go up in tumultuous clouds and bury the base of the cliffs deep in their warring depths.

The rollers subside as unaccountably as they come, and the heaving bosom of the sea sinks back to its accustomed calm. So unforeseen is the visitation, so stupendous the exhibition of unleashed power, that, lacking any visible and apparent reason for the upheaval, the beholder is tempted to ascribe it, not to remote cyclones, but to the viewless presence of some great sea-angel, whose downcoming at certain seasons troubles the waters and wakes them to restless tramlings on his path.

The Rollers are the most remarkable feature of Ascension. The short and sketchy annals of the island are what might be expected from the solitariness of its situation. For the last hundred years or so it has belonged to Great Britain, though precisely how we acquired it is difficult to dogmatize upon.

It had long been known. It was first sighted by the Portuguese navigator, Joao da Nova, while on his way to the Indies, on Ascension Day of the year 1501. That ambitious commander, dreaming, no doubt, of empire and India, passed on. He does not seem to have thought much of it. No attempt at landing was made, and the discoverer even forewent that almost invariable habit of the natives of the Iberian peninsula

of annexing it for his own country's purposes for ever, to the absolute exclusion of everyone else.

Intent to hold "the gorgeous East in fee," Joao da Nova sailed on; our own Elizabethans passed it by; and the next man of note who encountered it and left a record of the fact was the great navigator, naturalist and erstwhile buccaneer, Dampier.

That most delightful of seafaring companions tells us that he called there on the first deep water voyage that he made—that "warm voyage" he so desiderated—when he went out to Bantam and back in the East Indiaman, *John and Martha*, in the year 1671. They caught two turtles, he says; and Dampier, in his clear-sighted and intelligent way, made a note of the winds and soundings in the neighbourhood, which was to stand him in good stead long afterwards.

He was here again forty years later. In 1710, the old *Roebuck*, of which he was in command, after her dismal voyage of exploration on the west coast of Australia, came bucketing her weary way up the South Atlantic. She was worm-eaten and unseaworthy, patched aloft and riddled below, and leaking like a sieve.

With Ascension in sight, she sprang a fresh leak. For all that her weary company could do, the water gained on them. Dampier's own bedclothes had, ere this, been stuffed into the cracks; and now, in desperation, the hungry men were fain to ram some of their few remaining pieces of beef into the gaping seams. The heroic remedy failed. With her timbers working like a basket, her disheartened commander and mutinous crew just managed to warp their failing ship into the anchorage, when in a seaway as calm as a mill-pond, she filled and sank. She succumbed gently and went down at her moorings like a holed can.

Dampier and his men lived on the island for a

couple of months until they were rescued by some passing English men-o'-war. They subsisted on the flesh of turtles, with which the island abounds, and found a fine spring of fresh water on the south-east side of Green Mountain, about half a mile from the top. The discovery was made by Dampier himself, who, with his usual intelligent curiosity, was watching a herd of goats, and gathered from their behaviour that they must be near water.

The castaways took up their lodging in some hollow rocks between the spring and the coast, from which shelter they dispossessed the original inhabitants—goats, land-crabs, man-o'-war birds and boobies—and killed them for food. The natural dislike of seafaring men to be shut up in the centre of an island, remote from the sight of ships or any chance of escape, to which Crusoe calls attention, was accentuated in their case by further reasons, for, says Dampier, speaking of Green Mountain and its spring, "the continual fogs make it very cold here, that it is very unwholesome living by the water."

The castaways saw several ships, but none approached the island till the 3rd of April, when an English squadron consisting of the *Anglesey*, *Hastings*, *Lizard* and the *Canterbury*, East Indiamen, put in. They took off the survivors and carried them to the West Indies and thence to England.

Temporary inhabitants, seeking refreshment from the inhospitality of the sea, were all the population that Ascension could boast for the first three hundred years after its appearance in history. No doubt during that time its grim and unsheltered weather coast took toll of many vessels and was the scene of many a wreck—tall ships that, unseen and without trace, passed out suddenly from the pleasant ways of men. Could lonely islands speak, it is pretty certain Ascension would have a tale to tell. The hiatuses in its history afford much scope to the

imagination. Dampier mentions encountering a few shrubby trees in the heart of the island, near what is now called "The Devil's Riding Ground"—the cindery edge of a bare and blasted crater, inhumanly savage and terrific in appearance—on the bark of one of which the rough outline of an anchor and cable had been cut, and underneath the date 1642.

So bare the calcined scenery of the island, and so scanty its supplies of water, it is unlikely to have been visited by early mariners except under compulsion. That ubiquitous addition to the charm of most lonely islands, that of being the resting-place of a hoard of buried treasure, seems to be lacking in Ascension. Even the pirates passed it by; it was given over to its original inhabitants, the goats and rats and land-crabs, and the only treasure it can boast was that discovered by Dampier—the springs which still bear his name.

The repercussions of the great world force that in the beginning of the nineteenth century shook Europe to its foundations were felt even in this lonely Atlantic outpost. The career of Napoleon Bonaparte influenced the history of Ascension, even as it influenced that of most lands, and was the cause of the island becoming the home of a permanent population. When the vanquished Emperor was imprisoned in Saint Helena, the 500-miles distant neighbour of Ascension, the latter was occupied by a small garrison. A sloop's crew, in charge of a lieutenant, took possession of it, and, making the best of things, began diligently to scrape the least unlikely places on the surface of the ash heap in order to grow a few vegetables. Their landing probably constituted Great Britain's right to the island; no nation had hitherto thought it worth claiming, and none now came forward to dispute her right to colonize it, if she so desired.

The naval party spent six years on the island

before they were relieved. On Napoleon's death the Admiralty determined to continue their occupation and to make Ascension a place of refreshment for warships on the South Atlantic station, and, in 1821, a party of Royal Marines took over the duties of the garrison, and did their best to make life tolerable. They enlarged the tiny barracks and other buildings; dignified their little settlement with the name of the reigning sovereign; quarried and blasted swathes of the clinker-strewn surface to serve as roads; and built a house on Green Mountain, near the spring of water.

During the nineteenth century the island was often visited by passing vessels and served as a victualling base for warships. With the advent of the steam era it became a coaling station, and a fleet of fine, seaworthy little barques of 500 or 600 tons were employed carrying "best Welsh" thereto.

The population continued to be mostly naval men, with a sprinkling of Kroom-boys from the African coast, and their only occupation beyond attending to the needs of calling vessels was to keep a look out for Arab slave-dhows trading up and down the African coast. The officers of the garrison were frequent visitors on board calling ships—glad to have a talk, to see many-weeks-old newspapers, and to taste something fresh in the way of food, nearly all their own having to be imported. Turtles alone were plentiful; the Ascension turtles were reputed to be the finest in the world, and the colliers' crews fed on them until they hankered for the sight of an honest piece of salt horse. The only other amusements in the place were pulling over to Comfort Cove to catch fish, or chasing the innumerable boobies that swarm in the island, and alighted in vast numbers on a vessel's masts and spars, to the infinite detriment of her decks and the no small hazard of those who passed beneath.

At the present day the island remains under naval control and is administered like a ship in

service, with a commander and crew. It is not the first scrap of land our sea-loving race has refused to regard as terra firma, and has insisted on treating as though it were a three-decker and capable of making a passage. H.M.S. Excellent at Portsmouth is such another, its less usual title of Whale Island betraying the secret of its real nature. There was H.M.S. Diamond Rock, also, of glorious memory. When Admiral Hood was fighting the French in the West Indies in 1803, he fortified a small rocky islet off the south coast of Martinique, which controlled the fairway of the Fours Channel, and entered it in the books of his squadron as "H.M.S. Diamond Rock." It did a good deal of damage to the French before the rocky eyrie on its summit, where the guns had been planted, was abandoned for lack of water and munitions.

The shortness of our stay at the island gave us no opportunity of exploring the place. The miniature capital looked neat and orderly, as spick and span as a Dutch landscape, with bungalows peeping out here and there on the hillside. Everywhere else was a jumble of peaks and pit-like hollows, dull-black, burnt-brick or ashen grey, like the embers of a long dead furnace. Over all arched the blue dome of the sky, nicked by the remote and verdurous top of Green Mountain, which soared up from the savage desolation at its base to wooded heights where breezes blow and gentle showers and sunshine made a garden in the eye of heaven. Ascension Island, did its old Portugee discoverer call it?—this cinder heap in the windy immensity of mid-ocean, so bravely trying to be green? It is well-named: its single aspiring pinnacle proclaims it.

Not to it belongs the gorgeous luxuriance of the Caribbee Islands; the terrific grandeur of Kerguelen and the Crozets; or the voluptuous charm of those palm-fringed islets, mysterious and remote, sleepy with heat and musical with birds, alight with all the

magic of the East, which lie like jewels in the neck-lace of the East Indies, or on the broad bosom of the Western Pacific. Ascension is like none of these; and yet, when at evening we hove up anchor, loosed the fore topsail, and stood out to open sea, I felt a strange satisfaction at having visited it. Our pathway ran blood-red and aflame in the track of the sunken sun; the western portals of the sky were flung wide in a riotous blaze of glory. Far ahead Venus twinkled in the paling light, gem-like on the brow of ocean, and the peace of the sea was over all.

We sheeted home, drawing slowly through the water. Astern, the sombre island seemed to lose shape and character, folding itself reluctantly into the black wrappings of night. A few shore lights, scattered here and there about the slopes, gleamed pleasantly over the taffrail; we heard the solemn thunder of the surge on the rocks of Northwest Point, and the scream of a belated seabird.

A cable's length more, and we leaned to the freshening breath of the Trades. The sunset hues ebbed lower. The light paled rapidly. The sky broke into a million sparkling points of light, and the gaunt shape of the island, looming large for a moment, took wings and vanished into the night.

So, on the stream of life, the shapes and faces of the passing day emerge and melt—so, to a sailor on the homeless sea, come and go the ports desired.

“UNTO THE HILLS”



Caleta Buena.

“ UNTO THE HILLS ”

CALETA BUENA—the place is not marked on the majority of maps—is a grey little township in the department of Tarapaca in northern Chile, one of the smallest and bleakest of the nitrate ports. It owes its existence to nitrate; the presence of the mineral has redeemed from complete abandonment this corner of one of the most unmitigated tracts of desert in the world—the Pampa of Tamarugal.

It was to load the *Arethusa* with a cargo of nitrate that we had come to Caleta Buena, and a weary eight weeks, scorched by an ardent sun and rocking to the faint, unending swell, we spent at the task.

Loading apart, there was little to do and little to see. Before us lay the untidy town, the merest cluster of houses, fringed in front with a line of surf and backed by the sombre wall of the coastal range. It was a Saturnian anchorage, so different from what one would have expected in those latitudes of flashing blue and golden sun, sentinelled by the verdurous knolls of Masafuera and Juan Fernandez.

The great snowpeaks of the central range which we had seen coming up the coast—tiny, shining cones of silver on the faint blue wall of the lower heights—were no longer visible. The view was fore-shortened by that bare, lifeless, brick-coloured sierra which fronted the sea.

Day in and day out, that sombre prison-wall shut in the view. From the bright spears of dawn to the trailing banners of the sunset there was nothing else to see. It induced in one an ardent longing to escape

from its forbidding shadow, to scramble to its windy top and find freedom in the sight of the snowy Titans that lay beyond.

We had few opportunities of going ashore. The town looked coldly on visitors and had little to offer apprentices in the way of amusement. A day's liberty was given us before we sailed, and mine I resolved to spend in making a break for whatever Eldorado might be over the hill.

Early in the morning—the day was Sunday—I landed at the rickety iron mole from which the nitrate was loaded into lighters, and walked through the deserted, sand-encumbered streets of the town, to the oil tanks at its northern extremity. A mile or two beyond these last outposts of civilization is a rugged hill, some two and a half thousand feet high, which overtops its neighbours and makes it suitable as a vantage point. Towards it I turned, in the hope that from its summit I should have a view of the 'Andes.

There was no path, nor anything like one. At first the way was rocky and precipitous; then, a few hundred feet up, the incline grew easier, and much loose sand filled up the spaces between the outcroppings of stone.

An hour's climbing brought me to the top of the seaward cliffs, where a spiny stone ridge formed a barrier to the smooth yellow stretches of sand that swept inland and up to the mountain's summit. Even at this height the ships in the harbour were dwarfed to a navy of Lilliput, and the water, eight to twelve fathoms deep at the anchorage, was transparent as a film of glass. On the opposite side of the bay, the great southern bluff, its top on a level with me, stood boldly out, its inaccessible sides blotched with dull green stains where deposits of copper ore peeped through.

Up those loose sliding slopes of sand progress was a slow and laborious matter. Though the hour was

not yet eight the sun was already fiercely hot, and rocks and stones grew painful to the touch. The glare of the sand, too, was trying; the more so as it was necessary to keep one's gaze bent downwards, and tread warily.

With frequent halts for rest I plodded on. The slopes seemed interminable, and nearer the top the ascent grew steeper. The season was December and the sun shone down almost directly overhead. In my pocket I had a bottle of water, but so early in the day it seemed unwise to broach it, and I clambered on, cheered by the thought of the refreshing sight of the snows.

It was a wearisome climb. I had been walking for nearly three hours and the goal was not yet. All around reached a yellow and ochre sea of sand, fiery, impeding and grossly material, in regions where only clouds should drift and cooling breezes blow. At last the ultimate slope spread out before me. Another hundred yards, and then—"the beholden face of victory!"

The hour was about ten, judging by the height of the sun, for I had no watch with me, as I came ploughing over the curve of the crest, and looked questingly right and left inland.

Snow? there was not a suggestion of it. All that was visible was a swimming heat haze, quivering distortedly over the burnt ground, and, about another mile inland, a second range of hills, considerably higher than those whereon I stood, which shut in the view north and south.

I sat down disappointedly. It would have been wiser to have had a more normal holiday. But a sip from my flask altered the outlook. Why do poets sing the praises of wine?—water is the true elixir of the gods.

A brief rest, and the clean air of that great height, suggested the idea of going on. Making a mental

note of the bearings, and taking a last look at the infinitely far-away twinkling sea, that lay like a girdle of gleaming jade, I started off to cross the intervening valley to the farther line of hills.

The distance was only a mile or thereabouts, and the surface was comparatively flat until the foot of the rise was reached. The going was much less arduous than the climb up the face of the seaward range had been, but the ground soon became very uneven and broken, full of unforeseen pitfalls. There were rifts and chasms in it, with steep sides, down which a fall would have been fatal, for to have been injured ever so slightly on those deserted uplands would have meant lying unseen (save by the condors) until Doomsday.

One great ragged cleft in the earth I stopped to examine. It was roughly circular in shape, wall-sided, with boulders jutting out here and there, and a profundity as of the pit. I threw a big stone into its depths and never heard the sound of its fall. What it was, whether some old mine-shaft, or, as I rather think, a fissure caused by an earthquake, I could not determine.

The sun glared down out of a steel-like sky that seemed to arch over that rugged plateau like a solid and tangible dome. The silence was absolute, and the surface of the ground devoid of any slightest trace of life. Not the most infinitesimal spike of a cactus had I seen since I commenced to climb. Sand and the debris of rocks held sway between them. The loneliness and the desolation were appalling—a still, stark, lifeless desolation, so unlike the haunted loneliness of the sea.

I was glad to reach the foot of the line of hills towards which I had been making, and begin to scramble up their black boulders. They were rockier and less sandy than the range on the coast, and much stiffer to climb. With hands and feet I tackled them,

encouraged with the reflection that when I reached the top I should infallibly see the Andes.

Less than an hour's climbing brought me to the summit. As I breasted the last rise I realized that mountain peaks are like Paradise—he who would attain their felicity must be prepared to go “always a little farther.” Straight ahead, as I looked longingly eastward, rose another chain of hills, higher again than those on which I stood, and only separated therefrom by a steep and narrow valley.

Since Captain Forbes tragic miscalculation on the last voyage of the *Schomburg*, the deep-sea variant of the Nelsonic “Death or Westminster Abbey” has been “Hell or Melbourne,” and the phrase pithily expressed my feelings. Without staying for so much as a smoke, I plunged down into the valley and headed towards that next uncompromising range of hills.

The valley, or rather gorge, was rougher and stonier than the last; the hills loomed up more steeply (about four thousand feet above sea-level I learnt later that they were); and the radiant heat was no less intense and searing to the eyeballs. As near as I could judge the time was about midday; the fervid rays of the sun shone almost perpendicularly down, and afforded no patch of shade in all that wide-reaching wilderness of rock and sand.

Immediately in front of me was a small saddle between two rocky eminences, and towards this I made. From there, if anywhere, it seemed likely I should be able to command a view of the country beyond.

And this time I was not mistaken. As I mounted this topmost acclivity I saw that the heights, which appeared like a range of hills when seen from a lower level, were not in reality a range at all, but the rocky escarpment of a wide tableland.

Clambering expectantly through the scattered rocks on their fringe, as my eyes came level with the

summit, I saw stretching out before me, for league on league, a wide and rolling desert, shining yellow or blinding white—the great salt desert of Tarapaca. Stern and sun-scorched it ran, in undulating waves and broad pools of sand and glittering salt, an appalling God-forsaken wilderness of death. But there, on its farthest verge, forty, fifty, or perhaps a hundred miles away, was the sight I had set out to see. For yonder, outlined against the blue sky, sun-bright, unclouded, rose the icy towers and domes of the Andes, in unveiled magnificence at last!

The sudden sight caught up one's breath. Ether-ealized by distance, fairy-like as mountains visioned in a dream, it was hard to realize they were no illusion, no pinnacles of cloudland poised above the earth, but stupendous realities, the giant snow peaks of the main chain, the "White" Cordillera itself.

So to come upon them was as a glimpse of Paradise after the stony earthiness of the ascent. The height on which I stood, the still greater height to which those shining pinnacles, like the white throne of God, ascended, the unsullied clearness of the air, the irrefragable silence, and the unclouded blue dome above, made up a scene the beholder could never forget.

I stared at them for long. I walked along the crest of the ridge to see them from another angle, but that, of course, was impossible; the distance was far too great. I even clambered down the few yards of rocky ground that bordered the desert, and walked out into it, with my face towards the peaks. But a few hundred yards brought me to my senses and made me realize the futility of attempting to cross Tamarugal in an afternoon with a half-empty bottle of water. So I retraced my steps and sat down on a rock, to gaze leisurely at the everlasting hills and drink deep of the boundless peace of my environment.

Under many aspects and in many places, both

before and since, I have seen the Andes, but never in grander prospect. The mighty mounds of Sorata and Illimani; the giant bulk of Chimborazo, “father of mountains”; the soaring crest of Misti, surpassing Teneriffe, rivalling divine Fujiyama; and the stupendous fastnesses of the Oroya gorges, where the world seems upside down and the rosy-tinted clouds of sunset and sunrise swim, in silent voyagings, beneath one’s feet; these are the Andes triumphant, but none of them exhibit such a virgin-glory of fairness as here, where, across the grinning wastes of Tarapaca, rise the unsullied spires of the Bolivian Cordillera.

At length it occurred to me I had better think about returning. The hour was well past midday, and the way was long. Reluctantly I pocketed my pipe, tobacco and water flask, and scrambled to my feet. In order to keep the mountains in sight for as long as possible, I did not turn directly in my tracks, but followed the ridge for a mile or so to the north.

Somewhere in the desert on my right I knew that a thin line of nitrate railway ran down from Pisagua to Iquique, and that, scattered here and there about the waste, were dusty, sun-dried oficinas; but of neither one nor the other did I see anything.

Before descending the slope and shaping a course coastwards I turned to take a last look at the Andes. Still and austere they lay, white with untrodden ice in the full glare of the afternoon sun. Before them, like a watchful dragon, stretched the tawny wastes of the desert, guarding with Gorgonian terrors the white loveliness of the sleeping peaks. Then I turned and trudged downwards and they were hidden from view.

The way before me looked an Avernian soil to traverse. In most of the dry spaces of the earth there is something, some cactus, ice-plant or bristling ungracious shrub, that struggles to eke out a bare existence in the prevailing aridity of nature, but in Tarapaca there is nothing. On that last hopeless

waste-heap of the earth nothing grows, not the driest, spiniest thorn. Sand and salt contest for the mastery, and between their fell incensed points all life dies and only death lives.

How long it might take to get back to the ship I had no means of knowing. I kept on steadily, striking across the ridges and heading straight for the coast. The ground was inconceivably rough, and my boots were suffering badly. They were an almost new pair of kangaroo-hide bluchers, and were so cut and torn that I doubted if they would last to the journey's end.

As I drew nearer the coast the sterility did not seem quite so absolute. Not that there was the slightest trace of vegetation, but I encountered a number of tiny green lizards, which darted about with astonishing rapidity. What they lived on was a mystery insoluble. I also picked up a number of small shells, white in colour and shaped like those of winkles. And how they too got there, puzzles one's ingenuity to guess.

Yet these wastes of Tarapaca have not always been quite so deserted. In the early eighties they were the scene of some of the fiercest fighting in the Chilean War—a war that for ferocity and blood-thirstiness must be unequalled in modern times.

Somewhere across this desert of Tamarugal the gallant Buendia retreated, with his ill-armed and indomitable infantry, when the Chileans had made good their bitterly-contested landing at Pisagua. Across the death-like wastes he and his men plodded, abandoning their guns through the sheer impossibility of dragging them through the burning sand. Hard on his track came the Chileans, and in the valley of Tarapaca the hostile forces met. The valour of the Peruvians rolled back the onslaught of their foes, and gained almost the only victory that fell to their arms in the whole course of the war. Once again across

Tamarugal the beaten Chileans fell back, leaving, so terrible were the conditions of that warfare, their wounded, and even the footsore, to perish in the fastnesses of that inhuman desert. Then the course of war rolled on, to Tacna, Arica and elsewhere, until the fair capital of Peru felt the iron heel of the conqueror—and to this day bears traces of the ruthless occupation.

With an eye open for relics of Buendia's guns, I kept on due west and, at about four in the afternoon, came in sight of the sea. I struck the coast at a point that cannot have been far from Mejillones (though I saw nothing of it), and had still a long tramp before me.

As I topped the crest of the coastal range I crossed the mule-track that runs hereabouts from Pisagua to Tocopilla, by which cattle are driven down. In the valleys and ravines by the side of the track were piles of bleached bones, the carcasses of beasts, and, it may be, here and there the skeleton of a human being who had perished by the way and fallen into the ravines. In the quebradas farther inland some of the piled bones may well have been those of Peruvian highlander or Chilean roto who had fallen in that unforgiving struggle twenty years before.

The bones lay many feet deep in places, and in that pure air and salt-impregnated soil will doubtless lie for years, centuries perhaps, without decomposing. More than once I passed a carcass which still retained a few shreds of skin on its bones. It represented an animal that had only recently fallen, and inevitably, sitting solemnly at hand, would be two or three huge leathery-headed condors—coal-black in colour, grey tips to their ragged wings and deep ruffs round their necks, the very embodiment of winged ghouls.

Besides the condors, I encountered also a number of turkey buzzards. They are heavily-built buccaneers, and fly on a much more lumbering wing

than the region kites with which they share these solitudes. Two of them—they seem to fly in pairs—kept hovering around me for some time. On those untenanted uplands they afforded a searching test of one's nerves, as they came whirring heavily past. They are said not to attack human beings; nevertheless, they tempted me to loosen the sheath knife in my belt and look round for a handy piece of rock.

I came in sight of the sea again suddenly. I had been crossing ridge after ridge, up one slope and down another endlessly, when, as I attained a crest precisely like scores of previous ones, the ground fell sharply away, and I saw the sea beneath me. The ridge on which I stood was the last, and dropped sheer to the Pacific a couple of thousand feet below.

The precipice formed the back of a little bay, and on either hand the land ran out in jutting curves. Lying on my face, I crawled to the edge and peered over. The water, so far beneath, had a pale, transparent, unreal appearance; and great boulders, big as cathedrals, lay scattered about, looking no larger than pebbles. A thin line of surf reached almost to the base of the mighty cliffs. Its roar was just audible in a faint, rustling murmur, like the diapason of sound in a sea-shell.

From horn to horn of the bay's crescent the precipitous walls extended and rendered it wholly inaccessible from the landward side. Gulls flew about it, and sunken rocks lay to seaward: I doubt if human foot had been set in it since the creation of the world.

No sign of the town or the shipping in the roadstead was visible from where I stood. A little to the south, shutting out the view, was a bold, wall-sided headland—the Punta Paco of the charts, I took it to be. It had a peaked and rocky knoll, rising to close upon two and a half thousand feet above sea-level.

My way to the ship lay either over or around this headland, and its craggy summit looked so uninviting

that I determined to clamber round its seaward face. What appeared to be a thin ribbon of track wound erratically about it, nearly on a level with me, and a few hundred feet from the top.

Accordingly, I essayed the passage. Weariness had succeeded enthusiasm; my water was finished; my boots had succumbed to the strain put upon them; and, to say truly, the point had been passed when the majestic freedom of nature held charms superior to the disciplined confinement of the ship.

A few minutes' walking brought me to the smooth seaward face of the headland. The more or less level shelf narrowed as I advanced; at each step it became more steep and untrodden-looking. On one side, a little distance from my feet, the cliffs dropped sheer to the sea; on the other, within hand's reach, they towered up precipitously to the mountain's top. The rocky wall, to my uneasy imaginings, seemed conscious of what it was deliberately doing—edging me out at every step nearer to the perilous brink of the cliffs.

The heat, too, was terrific. The face of the mountain fronted the full blaze of the declining sun, and in the middle of its radiant expanse of rock, shelterless and perspiring, I crawled precariously.

Far overhead, in aery circles, a big bird floated. It was a condor, doubtless—watching me. All flesh is food to the king of American vultures, and their almost miraculous powers of sight bring them swiftly from afar “wheresoever the body is.” To one defenceless and in their own domains, the knowledge is disconcerting. There is almost as much discomfort as admiration in the thought that there are unseen eyes a-watch in the blue capable of such godlike omnispection.

The track narrowed still more, until it was now no more than a couple of feet wide. Sheer aloft towered the mountain wall; sheer beneath crawled the

wrinkled sea. There was nothing for it but to keep on. Keep on I did.

Narrower and narrower the way grew—the path to heaven is not more straitly confined. Soon it was only a foot wide, and my heart crept into my mouth, and stayed there. Almost I wished I had never come. What happened to the track : whether it endured in recognizable tenuity, or whether it melted into thin air and the mountain wall reached unbroken from sea to summit, I knew not ; there are no guide-books to that coast of the Cyclops. It was too late to turn back ; I had advanced over far along the narrow path ; all I could do was to walk carefully on—Agag trod never so delicately.

I was now very near the rounded extremity of the mountain. Should I be able to get round ? The shelf was no more than six inches broad, and sloping at that. The sand and splinters of stone my feet dislodged fell in tiny cascades and curving trickles outwards, and never touched anything till they reached the water curling over the rocks some two thousand feet below. I was scared—desperately so. With my face to the rock and arms outstretched I sidled along crab-wise, moving one foot at a time slowly and with infinite caution.

Would that microscopic line of foothold endure ? Further shrinkage it could not suffer and remain perceptible ; already it possessed little more than the properties of a true line—length without breadth. With night approaching and so many miles separating me from the nearest human habitation, it seemed rank foolishness to go on. Yet now to turn back was almost as bad ; were I to retrace my steps to the lip of that little bay, should I then be better advantaged for getting home ? I was betwixt the devil and the deep sea, if ever indiscreet sailor was.

The extremity of the bluff was a bare score of feet distant, and I screwed my face slowly and painfully

to the right to get a better view of it. A few feet more and I should know the worst—whether empty space lay beyond, or a widening path led to safety.

My hair was bristling with apprehension, as, inch by inch, I edged my way out to the point. I had been in tight corners before, but never in so nightmarish a situation as this. The object of my expedition seemed trivial, and I called myself, forcibly and with candour, a fool. Though not subject to giddiness, and accustomed to ride a rolling royal yard, it gave me a decidedly sick feeling to glance down between my legs and see the inaudible surf breaking creamily so many hundred fathoms below. What the mountain looked like above I did not know; spread-eagled as I was, it was impossible to look up, yet it felt like a living malignant thing, glaring down on the insignificant intruder on its isolation, and remorselessly pressing him, by imperceptible degrees, over the brink.

I should have yelled had I dared for the vibration of it, or had breath enough, as, clutching and gasping, with cautious wriggings and tiny sidelong steps, I crept out the last few inches to the point. It seemed to take an eternity of time. I was but a foot away from it—six inches—three, and stopped. Extended like a beetle mounted on a card, with every muscle strained, I craned my head sideways till my eyes came level with the point, and peered round.

The gods be praised! the path widened. The worst was over—nearly. There was but the point to double, and once round it, the shelf broadened to a couple of feet or more. Had it been otherwise I think I should have dropped; if not with weariness, with the sheer impossibility of doing anything else.

How I managed those last few inches and circumnavigated the knuckle of that malignant cape, I have no recollection. Some good angel must have lent the pressure of his wings against my back and helped

me round. The next thing I remember I was past the point, flying down the sloping shelf on the farther side as though it were a paved carriage road, and the slightest trip or stumble would not have precipitated me into empty air and at once rendered nugatory all my previous cares and cautiousness.

I slowed down after a little while and jogged on more steadily. Still there was no sign of the harbour or the ships. But a rounded height lay ahead of me, and this I thought I recognized as the one from which I had set out in the morning. Cheered by the thought, I hurried on as fast as I could.

On the way I encountered another cavity in the earth similar to that I had seen on the way out. Its sides were less steep, and jutting rocks afforded the services of a flight of steps. I was so unbearably thirsty it overweighed my weariness, and, in the ridiculous hope of finding water, I commenced to clamber down. The hole was pitch-dark, steeply-sloping rather than perpendicular, but before I had penetrated far I came to a cavernous pit, which broke away abruptly under my feet. It was the merest chance that I noticed it in time to avoid stumbling into its depths; my guardian angel must have held close to me that day.

The sun was not far from the horizon as I came to a saddle near the top of the mountain, which proved to be the one whence my wanderings in the wilderness began. From that point the ships were plainly visible, motionless on a darkening sea of glass. I hailed the sight of them with relief. Henceforth the way was all downhill, and the journey easy to make.

I have mentioned that the slopes of the mountain towards the Bay were of sand. First a steep sandy incline, then a small plateau, then steep again, and so on, I started to walk down the topmost slope, then involuntarily began to run. The loose sand prevented slipping, and before long I was taking forty-foot

strides and travelling at a speed no clipper ever attained. The way was clear, and I abandoned myself to it.

From the ship the mate was watching me, and he told me afterwards that I reminded him of a bird. The remark was meant to be satirical; nevertheless, I covered in ten minutes the distance it had taken me two hours to traverse in the morning.

I slowed down as I came across the last and widest of the plateaux and walked more leisurely the last few hundred yards and through the outskirts of the town. The first habitation I came to I entered and asked for a drink. Having no money I tendered my sheath knife in payment. The owner of the house, a lank half-breed, brought me, not water, but lime-juice—a big jugful of it—and declined the “cuchillo” with lifted hands. Heaven be good to that man! As I gulped the liquid down I felt that ten years of life would not be too high a price to pay for it.

I was pulled off to the ship as the last embers of daylight burnt crimson in the west. All day I had not seen a soul. My hands were raw, through scrambling over the rocks and round that unmerciful bluff; my feet were likewise, and the remains of my boots flapped round my ankles. I was dead-beat, burnt dry, and my limbs seemed immersed in a sea of fiery sand, but what of that? In my mind’s eye the sight of the Andes remained—an imperishable memory.

“MAC”

“MAC”

I

OF the many shipmates I have known, his memory is the greenest. He was a big upstanding fellow, cheery, hirsute and hard-featured—the first on a rope, the first up aloft, the first at a song. When we sailed from Antwerp he was the only Britisher in the fo’c’sle, and he towered above the rest of the hands, morally as well as physically. Nor, when we were hull down and away, did he belie his looks. The way he handed a mainsail, muffling the unruly canvas in his big brown hands, was good to see. And the songs he sang on the forehatch o’ nights would have drawn iron tears down Pluto’s cheek. The sentiment on them was a mile thick.

Yet he went under. How or why is a mystery to me, but go under he did. The hardness of men no doubt played a part, and the inhumanity of the sea, but beyond and above all workings of man and nature, there seemed an inevitability about it, as though Fate itself had taken a hand in events, and he were haunted by the hags that plagued Orestes.

He showed up well the first time I saw him. It was with the rest of the crowd on the fo’c’sle head, as the old *Pendragon* towed down the Scheldt. Even at that early stage in the voyage he stood apart from the other A.B.’s, the majority of whom were drunk. Upon him and the apprentices fell most of the work. Middle-aged and bearded, with a powerful frame and

a deep-set eye, he looked a likely man for bos'n, and the mate singled him out at once.

"What's your name?" said he.

"MacCarthy, sorr."

"Irish?" quoth the mate.

"Yes, sorr,"—and with a flash of heartfelt earnestness—"thank God!"

He was worth any three of the others during the run down Channel, and we congratulated ourselves that we had at least one prime sailorman for'ard.

Out at sea we soon got shipshape and Bristol fashion. The *Pendragon* had a fine crowd of apprentices, and the salt air and hard work quickly cured the men of their "shore-fever." The ship herself was a heeler, and she winged her way south like the stately ocean-wanderer she was. Everyone was glad to be out where "all's blue" again. Sailor town is a sordid place, and salt meridians are paradisaical by comparison.

Just at first, as ships go, we were a contented company. Windjammers had stern limitations, but there was a freshness and exhilaration about life on board them that has since passed from the mechanic footsteps of men.

How it first began to appear that there was a skeleton in the locker, and that one of our little company did not possess quite the "sound mind" in the "healthy body," I cannot definitely say. But pretty early in the passage it became evident that MacCarthy was not quite normal. The realization gained ground gradually, and was long enough in doubt. It is easy to be wise after the event; and looking back on it now I can see that almost from the outset there were little points in his behaviour which might have warned us that all was not entirely well with him.

They were nothing much: trifling mannerisms that one can hardly put a name to; peculiar ways of

regarding the person speaking to him, and the like. But they grew imperceptibly. No doubt he was not altogether sane when he came aboard; though of the fact of that we had not the slightest suspicion at the time. Even when he showed signs which, to an acute observer, would no doubt have been sure proof of something wrong, we thought nothing of it. Many an old shellback is queer, not to say crookedly-perverse, in his behaviour.

To the best of my recollection, the first hint we had of something in Mac exceeding the peculiarity of the average sailorman (though it passed unnoticed at the time), was off the Western Islands.

The day after passing Corvo we encountered what we took to be a derelict, but which may have been a fishing schooner with her masts unstepped.

All the time she was in sight Mac watched her closely. As she drifted past he lay over the rail peering at her. At intervals he would turn away, take two or three short strides up and down the deck, and return again to the rail, to stare searchingly at the distant craft.

So absorbed was he the mate had to shout at him at length, and he turned away with a twist on his features and his eyes bright and glittering, muttering words under his breath. His manner was distinctly curious, but we ascribed it to his reluctance to seeing the stranger go by without any attempt at communication on our part, and thought no more of it.

The incident passed as casually and completely as the derelict herself. Mac remained as good at his work as before. He was the best man in the watch, the undisputed “ boss ” of the fo’c’sle, and fairy-god-mother to the ship’s cat. A more unlikely figure of tragedy to come would be hard to imagine.

So the days slipped by. We ran down the North Atlantic; sighted the Canaries, with the packed cumuli of the Trades crowding heavily on the skyline;

and ran into blazing hot weather off the African coast.

The first intimation I had of something definitely amiss with Mac was one evening at eight bells, after a very furnace of a day, when I came on deck to relieve the mate. It was still insufferably hot; the ship slowly swung her pointed spires across a sky powdered with ten million gems of light, and the gently heaving sea was a fairyland of phosphorescence, globed and pointed with trembling elfin light. The chief was in no hurry to return to the inferno below. He stayed on deck yarning for a while, and in the course of our talk I happened to mention MacCarthy.

At sound of his name the mate paused in the preparation of the tobacco he was rubbing between his palms, and looked up. "That man's off his head," he said deliberately. "Absolutely daft, I should say. . . . The heat, perhaps. . . . He keeps mumbling to himself a lot of rubbish about corpses and Union Jacks and what-not."

"What has he done?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing much; only chawed the head off old Olsen for shifting his quid. But his whole behaviour—it's dam queer."

The mate said little more, and soon after went below. But his remarks had given me food for thought. Mac was in the mate's watch, and I saw little of him, but he had given me the impression of being a jovial, care-free soul, and he was by far the best man for'ard.

We spoke of the matter again a few days later, and the mate was convinced in his opinion. He said Mac was constantly guilty of little odd, unaccountable tricks, and on one occasion had worked himself up into a passion and had attempted to lay violent hands on his opponent—one of the ordinary seamen this time.

It seemed he could not contain himself if he saw

anyone spit. The idiosyncrasy was an awkward one, for expectoration was a habit largely indulged in by seafaring men, nearly all of whom chewed tobacco. He would have had the mate with him if he had only taken exception to surreptitious expectoration in unlawful places, but that did not satisfy him. The mere fact of chewing seemed to exasperate him, and its natural corollary brought him to white heat. He would at once drop the work he had in hand and come towards the culprit, menacingly and obviously not quite master of himself. He kept muttering, too, in his beard—unintelligible nonsense, it always seemed, about dead bodies and a Union Jack.

The mate was puzzled to know what to do about it. I agreed with him that perhaps it was the heat, for the weather was unbearable, that had temporarily turned MacCarthy's brain, and suggested that perhaps he would get better as we drew farther south. There was nothing much that one could do but keep an eye on him and hope his uncanny behaviour would not get worse. I had been shipmates once before with a man who had a bee in his bonnet. His weakness had taken the form of imagining that every woman he met was in love with him, or rather that some light o' love he had left behind took shape in a thousand different persons. He had been an endless nuisance in the Colonies, and on the West Coast spent hours on the fo'c'sle head waving his shirt to every loiterer on the beach. But he was a decent old fellow, and when we got back to Liverpool it gave me keen satisfaction to see him in Canning Place with a buxom female on his arm. He had found her at last!

But MacCarthy was different. He was as strong as a bollard, and it was no light matter if he developed man-handling propensities.

So we surged leisurely south. Now that I had had a hint of the true state of affairs I observed MacCarthy at odd moments, and he *was* queer; there

was never a doubt of it. I was prepared to swear, too, that his face was changing. It was his eyes more than anything else; they were not normal; they seemed to be taking on an appearance of blankness and fixity.

But there was nothing to be done. "Who can minister to a mind diseased?" Certainly not deep-water sailormen. Windjammers were ill places for anyone with a weakness, whether in his hand or his head. Nobody understood, and nobody sympathized with such. The work had to be done, gruelling as much of it was, and if one man failed it meant the others had to do his share. The fact did not make for the popularity of the failing one.

Still, Mac was well to windward of that yet. We knew he was not quite *compos mentis*—by this time all hands were talking of it—and there was nothing more to be said. With the exception of one or two minor lapses, he himself was still the same competent seaman, and carried on normally enough on our passage across the Line and down the south-east Trades.

In due course we got down to the latitude of the Cape. In the buffeting we experienced off that stormy headland we had reason to think that the attribution of Mac's strangeness to the heat was well founded.

We encountered an exceptionally heavy blow on the edge of the Agulhas current. It began to pipe up one night out of the nor'ard. We shortened the ship down to lower topsails, and just at eight bells took in the foresail.

The night was as black as an underground cellar. The only thing we could see as we stumbled for'ard was the gleam of a monstrous foam-crested wave rushing away from the lee bow, tinged with the pale spectral green of our starboard sidelight. The ship was labouring wildly; green seas were pouring aboard,

and by the fore fiferail all hands were stumbling about, feeling for the lines.

As I groped my way over to windward a bulky figure bumped into me.

“ That you, Mac ? ” I shouted. “ Haul taut these buntlines ! ”

We barged down against the lee rail, felt for the lines, and hauled together, taking in the slack inch by inch as the weather clew was hauled up.

Mac was a powerful man, and he worked with a will. His shoulders heaved and his muscles cracked, and his voice, as he sang out on the rope, had a cheery, confident ring. “ There’s nothing much wrong with you,” I thought, as a sea swirled in over the fo’c’sle head and down on top of us, and Mac lay back on the buntline with weight and masterly indifference.

On the yard he was as good. Short-handed as we were, he was a watch in himself. Handing a fore-sail on a dark night in a gale of wind is not a pastime for a lunatic, and there was nothing of a lunatic about Mac. He heaved and shouted with a strength and cheeriness that left even Bates, the eldest apprentice, far behind. And Bates—whatever he was in the half-deck—was a hero on a topsail yard.

All the time the storm lasted Mac was the handiest man on board. He completely wiped out the memory of any previous lapses on his part. On deck or aloft he worked and fisted the canvas with something of a berserker rage and ruthlessness. The harder the wind blew the better he seemed to enjoy it. I felt sure it was the purgatorial heat in the region of the Line that had been his temporary undoing.

Yet there was a moment when I doubted. The lashings of the port bower had worked loose, giving the anchor an inch or two of play, and Bates, Mac and I were on the fo’c’sle head securing it. A heavier sea and a deeper plunge than usual took us off our feet and landed us in a struggling heap together. As we

scrambled up I caught a glimpse of Mac's face. It was as calm as a child's; there was a look of utter peace about it. I thought he must be hurt.

"All right, Mac?" I asked.

He turned towards me that untroubled face of his: "Aye, aye, sorr," he said absently, a blank, far-seeing look in his eyes.

The detachment in their stare was absolute; it puzzled me; they were too vacant, too superhumanly empty.

Bates was beside us, shaking the water from him and cursing, with a rich, unceasing flow of profanity, at the sea, the ship, and all things else. His behaviour was natural; and in strong contrast to Mac's, which was very much otherwise. Those eyes of his were too calm, too unruffled, too obviously intent on something immeasurably far beyond us, to be less than startling under the circumstances. Their abysmal quietude was appalling.

But that was all; otherwise Mac was his own cheery, untiring self.

Then we got into port, and in the three pleasant weeks we spent there, bad weather and Mac's peculiarities alike were forgotten.

II

Pleasant as port was, it was good to be at sea again and watch the trucks begin their old gyrations. Ships, after all, were made for sailing, not for lifeless inaction alongside a wharf, and there is a rare sense of contentment in the heave and dip of a long hull standing out and away over the beckoning skyline.

Almost as soon as we cleared Capetown it was obvious Mac had grown worse during our stay in port. He had—in itself a wide change—become morose and

sullen. Never mixing much with the other men, who, as I have said, were all foreigners, he now kept himself entirely aloof. He no longer took a share in the dog watch sing-songs; and, as we were soon to find, his queer lapses recurred at more frequent intervals.

To make matters worse, the crowd for'ard shaped badly. We had shipped two new hands in Capetown, in place of two who had run, and the newcomers soon proved a couple of unmitigated blackguards. One of them was a thick-set, middle-aged man, named Burke; the other, Achmet, a gaunt, hollow-eyed Arab. They were both foul-mouthed, insubordinate rascals, and both were in the mate's watch.

They were a constant source of trouble, and infected the other men with their malingering, but it was poor, unballasted Mac who was the darkest storm cloud on our horizon.

We soon found that he was to be depended on no longer. One morning, soon after we got to sea, he was working on the fo'c'sle head with Jeffries at the jib sheets. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, he plucked a belaying pin out of the fiferail and struck savagely at Jeffries. That surprised youth dodged, jumped over the spare spar, and, stepping backwards, tumbled down the fo'c'sle ladder and landed heavily on the main deck.

It was a nasty fall, and Jeffries was a good deal bruised, and a good deal more frightened. For a few seconds Mac glared at him over the rail, muttering incoherently; then he put the pin back in its place and fell silent. Soon after he returned to his work. What caused the outburst no one knew; Jeffries swore he had done nothing to provoke it.

The strange thing about Mac's onslaughts was that hitherto he had acted like a man in a dream, violently but aimlessly, as though unconscious of his actions. Whatever he did was done deliberately,

without hurry or apparent malice. It was fortunate it was so. He was an exceptionally powerful man, and, had it been otherwise, he would have been vastly more dangerous.

But that seemed to be changing now. He broke out again a day or two later, manhandling Jorgen, a Swede, and on this occasion he showed himself decidedly vicious. It took three men to haul him off, and for long afterwards he sat on the fore hatch, his eyes glittering, mumbling feverishly under his breath.

His eyes were terrible at such times. Hitherto their normal expression had been calm to the point of vacancy. But when he was stirred from his lethargy, and more and more frequently now, they took on a very different appearance. His eyelids narrowed, and the pupils seemed to shrink, assuming a reddish tinge. He had a trick of grinning at such moments, and this, in conjunction with the fiery glitter in his eye, gave him a downright demoniac appearance.

As the days passed he grew more and more unsettled. He took to mooning about the decks in his watch below—a sufficiently unusual thing for a sailor to do. One got little enough sleep in a wind-jammer without wasting the precious hours in uneasy ramblings round and about the deckhouse and fore-hatch.

It made one uncomfortable to watch him—his comings and goings were so uncanny. He seemed like a man fighting some devil of his own imagining, some hideous nightmare of the mind. I watched him one night wandering round the deck through the whole of the first watch. The night was close and dark—a vast gloomy cavern, lit by the ghosts of stars. Their pale light gleamed from gulfs inconceivably remote in the funereal heavens. Interminably, passing in and out of the alternate light and shade

beneath the sails, I saw Mac's restless form afoot upon the decks—unquiet, inappeasable, spectre-haunted.

It was a state of affairs that could hardly go on indefinitely. Mac was becoming a creature apart, and breaking up rapidly and completely. He was growing dangerous, too, as his last attack showed—neither under his own control, nor that of anyone else. At any moment the next ebullition of his insanity might have disastrous consequences.

What the captain thought of it I do not know. He was fully aware of Mac's condition, and was the one to take action. But Captain Rodway was a reserved commander and rarely took anybody into his confidence. Firm-lipped, square-jawed and grey of eye, he came of old New England stock, and was as hard and impenetrable as only one of those stern sea-Puritans can be.

So, an uneasy little ship's company, urged on by the solemn shouting of the sea and the pricking knife-point of the wind, we ran our easting down.

The day we passed Saint Paul's Island, while we were surging under t'gallant-sails to a stiff, sou'-westerly gale, an incident occurred that brought matters to a head.

Mac—who had been more tranquil for a watch or two—had been sent aloft to serve the backstays in the wake of the fore t'gallant outriggers, and Reynolds, one of the apprentices, had been ordered up to give him a hand.

While they were at the job, Reynolds, who was a mischievous youngster and rapidly acquiring all the bad habits of the men, forgetful at the moment of Mac's aversion, spat over the side.

He said he never gave a thought to what he had done (which was probably true enough), until, glancing up, he saw Mac staring at him. His eyes were

narrowed and his lips moving, and deliberately he began to edge in towards Reynolds.

He looked so menacing Reynolds grew scared. He knew the danger of being cornered on the outrigger, so he muttered an excuse about going down for something or other, slipped into the crosstrees and made his way down on deck as speedily as possible.

At once Mac followed him—determined, wry-mouthed, muttering. He was only ten feet or so behind the boy when the latter stepped on deck. Reynolds immediately ran aft, and as he did so, Mac, with a grunt of anger, plucked the marlinespike he had been using from his belt, and hurled it after him.

The heavy, sharp-pointed iron missed Reynolds by inches, and penetrated half an inch into the planking, where it stuck quivering. It was the most vicious attempt Mac had so far been guilty of.

Burke and Achmet were working for'ard. They must have noticed what was happening and seen the savagely-thrown marlinespike. But they made no effort to interfere. There was little love lost between half-deck and fo'c'sle, though in justice to the others, I must say that none beside that precious pair would have stood by and seen blood shed. Perhaps they thought mad Mac's outbursts served to divert attention from their own malingering.

Fortunately Ferguson and Jeffries were on deck, too. They rushed over to Mac and laid hands on him. He was furiously excited and struggled vehemently. It was all the boys could do to hold him. For a moment it looked as though there were going to be a general fight. Then the mate ran for'ard, and between them they half-dragged and half-pushed MacCarthy into the fo'c'sle.

This happened just before eight bells in the forenoon watch, and I heard of it when I came on deck. In the afternoon, when the port watch came on duty again, Mac was still intractable. He refused to turn

out. Not in so many words, for he never opened his mouth. He sat heavily on his sea chest and paid no attention to anything said to him. A man hewn out of stone could not have been more unheeding.

Mr. Baxter came for'ard and ordered him to turn to, but with no result. He sat motionless and silent, with his wide-open eyes fixed steadily in front of him. The mate perforce came aft again and reported the matter to the captain, who received the information with a curt nod. A deadlock seemed to have been reached.

For some little while the captain continued his walk up and down the poop, then he went below. Almost immediately he came on deck again, sent word for the carpenter and spoke to the mate, who went for'ard.

When Chips came aft the captain took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and handed them to him. “ Come for'ard,” he said to me.

We followed him along the main deck to the fo'c'sle. He flung the door open and walked straight in, the carpenter and I behind him.

It was unusual for a sailing ship captain to enter the fo'c'sle of the ship he commanded without giving warning of his intention, and unprecedented for an officer to do so. The fo'c'sle was the sanctum of the men, and their privacy was usually respected.

The watch below had just brought along their tin of tea from the galley and looked up, astonished, as we entered. They were sitting around on chests and at the rough hanging table—Burke in the foreground, Achmet in his bunk, and Mac at one side, still stonily indifferent, taking no part in the preparations for supper.

Captain Rodway turned to the carpenter and me. “ Now,” he said, pointing to MacCarthy, “ put that man in irons ! ”

Two or three of the men, Achmet among them, jumped to their feet, taken by surprise at the order.

Burke glared at us malevolently ; he had been almost openly mutinous for days and probably thought his turn was coming next, but with the courage of the true cur, forbore to be the first to move. Yet for a moment it looked as though there would be resistance. MacCarthy alone sat absolutely silent and unmoved.

A growl and muttered query ran round the fo'c'sle. The men were resentful ; some inclined to be defiant. But if the idea of making a fuss occurred to them, the sight of the captain in the doorway, alert and granite-faced, with his hand resting lightly on his pocket, caused them to think better of it.

Chips and I walked over to MacCarthy. He still sat apathetically on his chest. Without the slightest attempt at resistance, without betraying either anger or surprise, he suffered us to snap the bracelets over his wrists. A couple of clicks, and he was fast.

" Bring him out here," said the old man.

We brought him out on deck, and found that the boys, under the mate's direction, had emptied the paint locker of its pots and drums, and made it ready for the reception of MacCarthy. It was a perfectly bare apartment, some six feet long by three feet wide, broader above than below, owing to the inward curve of the bows, with naked paint-stained walls and a narrow bunk as its sole furnishing.

Under the captain's orders MacCarthy was put inside ; a bucket was given him to sit down upon ; the captain locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and returned aft.

So that was the end of it, and poor Mac's aberrations had brought him to this ! With no light, with no clothes save those he stood up in, and with the irons on his wrists, he was left with his storm-troubled mind in solitude. There he remained, unwashed and alone, for the remainder of the passage.

It sounds hard, and it *was* hard ; but under the circumstances what else could have been done ? Mac

was a lunatic and a dangerous one. Sorry as we all felt for him, he had to be kept close. Not a man but knew, now that it had come to open insubordination, the captain could hardly have dealt with him otherwise. Sooner or later, one of his outbreaks would have had a fatal termination. And a shipmaster, moreover, responsible for all the lives and property under his control, cannot permit a lunatic to be at large about his ship. It was sharp medicine for Mac, but bitter necessity constrained his taking it. As for the stark nature of his prison cell, there was no alternative; scant provision was made for those afflicted, whether in mind or body, on windjammers that used the West Coast trade.

In the paint locker Mac remained for the rest of the passage. We doubled Cape Leeuwin a fortnight later, carried squally winds across the breadth of the Bight, and reached Wallaroo, our destination in the Spencer Gulf, forty-three days out from Capetown.

III

Australia lies outstretched refreshingly to the nor'ard of the saltwater pathway round the world, like a caravanserai by the side of some imperial highway of old Persia. We looked forward to a pleasant stay in Wallaroo after our wretched run from the Cape and promised ourselves that when we sailed some of our troubles would be left behind. Mac, at any rate, would be no longer with us.

As soon as the ship was snugly moored, the irons were knocked off, and it was hinted to him pretty plainly that the best thing he could do was to leave the ship and convey himself ashore.

Though he had been in the paint locker nearly three weeks he evinced no surprise or joy when he

was liberated, and no eagerness to shake off the dust of the ship from his feet. Jamieson and I went for'ard to let him out; we unlocked the handcuffs and, without speaking, Mac sat himself down on a windlass bar under the fo'c'sle head. His manner displayed the utmost indifference, not to say apathy. He would not be persuaded either to go into the fo'c'sle, or even to come out on deck and look at the shore.

"Well, Mac, there's the beach," said Jamieson, as we came aft and left him, "and if you want to clear out and find a berth ashore, nobody's stopping you."

Mac took no notice of him. Poor fellow! he hardly seemed to hear. There had been a devastating change in his appearance since we left Table Bay. Little doubt now as to whether he were mad or not. His big body was like a rudderless ship, abandoned by its living company. The divine spark in him was quenched—a burnt-out star swinging blindly through the blank and awful spaces of his brain.

We left him, and he wandered vacantly about the fo'c'sle head and the fore-deck all day. He was perfectly quiet and inoffensive. He paid no attention to anyone; and, for their part, the hands left him very much alone.

The question of what to do with him seemed by no means settled. But later, when work had been knocked off for the day, one or other of the men persuaded him into the fo'c'sle for his supper, and presumably prompted him to clear out. At any rate, he disappeared ashore that night, and we thought we had seen the last of him. Heartily I wish it had been so!

With Mac, or at least at the same time, went Burke and Achmet. We bore their loss with resignation. The captain did not even trouble to have search made for them. But Mac—marked by the Fates as their victim—was not so easily got rid of.

He wandered about the streets of the town for a couple of days. Bates and some of the others saw him, and gave him a little money. Where he slept or what he lived on was a mystery. This lasted for three or four days, then what might have been expected happened. He fell into one of his black moods again, and assaulted two men, stevedores, going home from their work, who, in passing him, spat on the sidewalk.

We heard the details of the incident afterwards. The stevedores were two strapping young men, but Mac knocked them flying. His behaviour grew more and more violent, a crowd soon collected, and, the police coming up, he was arrested. While in custody his manner was so extraordinary that the authorities had him medically examined, and the upshot of it was he was pronounced insane.

Now it is a serious thing to bring a madman to the Colonies and permit him to wander about not under control. The police made inquiries and ascertained from where MacCarthy had come, whereupon they at once came down to the ship. A great to-do was made of the affair. The captain found himself in serious straits, and only just weathered a heavy fine. He was not a little surprised—so were we all—at the turn events had taken.

The police, of course, regarded MacCarthy as a deserter; there was no suggestion of any connivance at his escape. Had they known that he had been in irons for the latter part of the passage and was only liberated on our arrival in port, ignorance of the law would have been no sufficient plea. The captain would certainly have been brought into court over it.

As it was, he was required to find two hundred pounds as security for MacCarthy's safe keeping while we remained in Wallaroo.

The next day the poor cause of all the trouble was brought back on board. He had been tidied up a little

while in the charge of the police, but one look at him was enough to show that he was more hopelessly insane than ever. He was no longer ironed, but was put back in the paint locker; and a policeman was posted on the gangway to see that he did not get ashore again and that the course of the law was not evaded.

In his paint locker Mac remained throughout our stay in Wallaroo. To this the malevolence of circumstance had brought him! Denied a refuge on dry land, he was condemned to the mercies of the deep sea, such mercies as he could find shut up and secluded in his comfortless iron cage.

There was only one redeeming feature about the whole business: he himself did not seem to take his confinement much to heart. As a matter of fact, so far as outward indications went, he showed entire indifference to it—and all other mundane considerations. Neither heat nor cold, nor hunger nor thirst, nor solitude nor companionship, seemed to weigh in the slightest degree with him. He sat stonily on the edge of his bunk, or stood upright on his narrow patch of floor, waiting patiently, as it seemed, for some unknown event to emerge from the womb of time to shadowy birth. Sailors are not much given to sentiment, nor swayed by intensity of imagination, or the presence of that pathetic figure shut up night and day in his bare den would have cleared the ship of her company.

From Wallaroo we went round to Newcastle to load. The winds were foul, barring the passage of the Bass Straits, and we had to go round about Tasmania, where the ugly Mewstone pokes its unwanted head out of the sea and adds to the hazard. We were a fortnight on the passage, and, throughout it, Mac remained in his narrow cell.

Arrived in Newcastle, the police authorities gave us no chance to get rid of him quietly. They were

prompt in their measures. The Wallaroo people had evidently telegraphed them, advising them of our departure and stating that we had a dangerous lunatic on board.

We were met by the police immediately we made fast up the Dyke. A policeman was at once put on watch at the gangway. There, with frequent reliefs, an officer remained throughout our stay in Newcastle, and did not leave us till the tug-boat had been made fast ahead.

To make assurance double sure, the captain was again compelled to give a surety of two hundred pounds. An alternative, it is true, was offered him. It was that of sending MacCarthy home on a liner, as a certified lunatic, in charge of a properly qualified keeper. The alternative, to the intense regret of us all, was rejected. The expense, of course, would have to be borne by the ship; and Captain Rodway was not slow in declining.

Once again it seemed that the stars in their courses were fighting against our ill-fated shipmate. Thankful indeed we should have been to have seen him safely shipped to England, and to have been relieved of his presence for the wild passage and bleak coast ahead of us. But it was not to be. Who may forego his fate?—having shipped with us, MacCarthy was doomed to see the thing out to the bitter end.

From the captain's point of view there was something to be said for the course he adopted. Freights were low, and the chance of a charter home uncertain. He would naturally be unwilling to spend in such a manner, without direct instructions from the owners, another hundred or so of their dwindling profits. I imagine, however, he gave the matter considerable thought, for, though usually reticent of speech, he mentioned at the cabin table that our coal charter for Salaverry was only fourteen shillings per ton. “ It will barely pay expenses,” he said. Be that as it

might, the Colonial authorities did not press the point, and the consequence was Mac remained in confinement, and daily expiated his sin of insanity.

Fortunately, we had a quick discharge in Newcastle, and ten days after entering the port, towed out past the Bluff, with over two thousand tons of coal under hatches, and MacCarthy still on board.

IV

Almost as soon as we left Newcastle the captain sent for MacCarthy and asked him if he would turn to. Shorthanded as we were, we should have been glad of his help, how little soever it might have been, but the captain might have spared his trouble. Mac came along docilely enough, a vacant smile on his face. To the captain's repeated questions he answered never a word. He was not sullen; he was not in one of his scorpion-stung moods; he seemed simply incapable of hearing. There was a terrible detachment about him. His momentary docility was almost worse than violence; the ghastly stupid smile on his face was as a mask that hid the awful realities beneath.

Captain Rodway was sternly encouraging, but Mac remained beyond his reach. Never again, it was clear, would he work shoulder to shoulder with us. And one glance at his herculean figure and tragic face was sufficient to forbid his going free. The risks were too great, and back the poor wretch had to go to his irons and his paint locker.

Some of the new men, who had not seen one of Mac's outbursts, vowed that he was not mad at all, but obstinately and perniciously sane. With the crabbed wrong-headedness of elderly seamen, they said he was bluffing, and knew well that his paint locker was "a damn sight snugger berth than the

fo’c’sle ” in a shorthanded ship running her easting down.

The truth was so pathetically otherwise I only mention the fact to show that though Mac was reduced to such straits of misery, the nature of shipboard life was hard enough for his plight to provoke as much grumbling as sympathy.

The long southern winter was setting in with a furious intensity as we fought our way to the southward. The winds were foul, and it took us long to beat down to the Snares, the polar outposts of New Zealand. Struggling as best we could against an icy wind that howled down on us, we were set so far to the westward it was touch and go whether we should succeed in doubling the Cape or should have to turn in our tracks and go round by the Three Kings to the north of New Zealand.

Day after day we plunged into it, the wind hourly assuming a more icy edge and the great seas increasing in sterner and more majestic wrath. The wan and yellow daylight endured for no more than seven out of the twenty-four hours; the rest of the time we were enshrouded in a cavernous gloom, as black and cold as yesterday’s fires in Hades, save when the Southern Lights flickered in the sky, like a ring of uplifted falchions held guard-wise round the Pole.

It was wild weather—wild even for mid-winter in the vast solitudes of the south. The air was bitterly cold, barbed with a keen and unforgiving edge that required courage to face. Suffering its asperities, one’s only relief was to hurl one’s self in a Berserk fury, on the spearpoints of the blizzard, and find warmth and courage in fierce contact with relentless winds and icy water, exulting in one’s own hardihood. To falter in that pagan sense of pride was to be beaten, whipped and broken down in abject misery.

If it was bad for us, what, I often thought, must

it be like for the poor wretch for'ard? Wild as it was on deck, there one at least had the satisfaction of standing up against it, and finding courage in the contest. But to be shut up in a deckhouse, hearing the howling gale and the thunderous seas storming aboard and smashing madly against one's frail partition, was far worse. On deck one could at least see, and be on the alert; below, one was helpless, shut up and blindfolded in the dark.

I hated to go for'ard, to catch a glimpse, through the porthole in the door, of that abject figure, cast out, as it seemed, from the mercy of God and man. His appearance grew steadily worse. The mother that bore him would have been frightened at him. He would do nothing for himself, nor let anyone else. He was becoming filthy and verminous, and the look in his eyes, sometimes pathetic, always appalling, was enough to give the beholder ineludible nightmares.

With New Zealand astern the wind came fair, and we roared across the meridians in a straight line to the Horn.

Day and night, for weeks on end, the gale never faltered. The wind tore unceasingly at the ship, and sometimes, for three days on end, the narrow ribbon of our lower topsails was all the canvas that even the old man wanted to spread. And like the wind was the sea—a mountain range of water, endued with a mad momentum.

Up and down their endless slopes our racing bows swept, cutting through their snowy tops, and sending the freezing spray whistling over the foreyard. The reeling spars gleamed ghostly white against the dull leaden murk of the sky and the ragged edges of the flying clouds. The tensely drawn shapes of the topsails stood out hard and wetly grey.

The overworked watches were hardly strong enough to handle the ship, swooping and roaring

across the wild leagues of the high Pacific. Neither one nor the other could take in sail singlehanded, and it was all hands in consequence, almost every other watch. The wet and sorely tried crowd were almost excusable in thinking the maniac for'ard was wise in his generation.

His presence on board affected all hands. One and all were conscious of it, seemed dimly resentful of the fact, and expressed their uneasiness in various ways. No one liked to go for'ard, to the quarter where that poor reason-wrecked soul was shut up in his rabbit-hutch, filthy, tongue-tied and forlorn, dreaming in his mind of God-knows-what hideous fancies. The mightiness of ocean took on an added terror when one thought of it as a vast prison-house for one plagued and tormented spirit. The ship herself, stampeding over the unbroken waste of tossing water, and struggling up against the unending pressure of the blast, like a savagery of beating wings upon her, seemed to feel the incubus of the freight she carried, and to be ever striving to escape from it.

But day and night were both alike; the storm blast tore at us, and Mac glared behind his prison bars. There was no escape from either.

The grim combination oppressed one like a tangible load. The black anger of sea and sky seemed in the nature of a personal enemy, to be battled with tooth and nail; and the presence of that stricken and ironed wretch like a sin of one's own doing, haunting one with the persistence of an unforgiven crime. Yet no one was responsible for Mac's condition; neither we his shipmates, nor he himself. He was the victim of Fate, such a fate as sent Orestes, scorpion-bitten and hag-ridden, round the world. If one could have blamed some definite person or thing the fact would not have been so terrible. But neither unconsidering men nor blind gods had wrought his downfall. He was in the grip of a greater power—that awful over-

ruling Destiny that stalks unhampered through the affairs of men and broods, as in his own domain, with an unsleeping eye over the face of the waters. Destiny! Let those who worship a superior power look into a maniac's eyes and confess Fate's inexpugnable supremacy.

Perhaps to others the human hardness of it will seem more evident than the ineludible scourge of Fate. But it was not so; than what we did there was nothing else we could do. From Captain Rodway to the cabin boy the necessity was as obvious as it was hateful. The captain would have been only too glad to have let MacCarthy loose, as he more than once said plainly, if he could have been sure he would do no harm. But he had no such assurance. Rather the reverse. A sailing ship was not a sheltered backwater where the weak and ailing could be nursed back to health and permitted to wander at their will. Apart from attacking a man and disabling him, Mac might have done mischief to the ship herself. Suppose it had entered his head to let fly a topsail halyard or a brace—things he could have done in the twinkling of an eye—what would have happened? In the weather that we were then experiencing it would have been the end of the ship. The captain was responsible, and he did the only thing possible under the circumstances when he kept Mac under control. It was one thing to realize the cruelty of it, and another altogether to devise an alternative. We, no less than Mac, were in the grip of Destiny.

Forty-seven days out we sighted the South American mainland in the neighbourhood of Mount Aconcagua, the giant nevada of porphyry which is the culminating point of the southern portion of the Andes. Thankful we were to see it, lifting its notched saddle to the sky. It meant the passage was nearing its end.



The Chinchas.

As soon as ever we had hauled a bit to the nor'ard and the weather had grown finer, the Captain had compassion on MacCarthy. By his orders he was brought out each day on deck at noon, and shackled to a bridge stanchion, with one hand keeping watch over him. Vigilance was necessary, for Mac was dangerously uncertain in his behaviour. Chained up as he was, he attempted one day to knock Jeffries down with his manacled hands, as the boy passed near him. For some unaccountable reason he seemed always to have borne a grudge against Jeffries. Had it been Reynolds one could have understood it, for Reynolds was a tiresome young scamp, but Jeffries was a most inoffensive first-voyager.

For about an hour each day Mac was allowed out on deck; then he was put back in the paint locker and the door locked. This was the daily practice on our passage up the coast, until we dropped anchor in our destination, the little harbour of Salaverry, the port of Trujillo.

V

Of our stay on the Coast there is not much to say. We discharged our coal in Salaverry, then went down to the Chinchas to load. In neither place had we much communication with the shore. In the rolling roadstead of the first, remote from the scanty collection of houses that formed the port, and in the unsheltered anchorage of the second, the land was as inaccessible as it was undesirable. Mac had perforce to remain on board, confined in his bare compartment, a prisoner to the bolts and bars of the ocean.

He was brought on deck, for change and fresh air, whenever opportunity offered, but always had to be carefully guarded. His strength was still above the

average, and we never knew when he might break out. We tried to get him ashore, but failed. At Salaverry it proved impossible to get him past the Customs, and on the Chinchas there was nothing but the cholos' camp of sacks and kerosene tins. One could hardly leave him there. The Rainless Coast is at best a bleak and stern corner of the earth's surface, but never had it seemed so hateful and inhospitable as now, while we laboriously discharged one cargo and loaded another.

In due time we got the last bag of guano on board, bent sail, and stood over to Pisco Bay. There we replenished our water, and sailed at once. Hamburg we learnt was our destination. It was a full four months ahead, and Mac was still with us. Never did I look forward to being homeward bound and forcing the barriers of old Cape Stiff with less anticipations of pleasure.

The very heavens above us seemed presageful of dire happenings. I shall never forget the sunset the evening we sailed. As the sun disappeared below the far edge of the Pacific, the pathway it had traversed became suffused with red. The glowing colour deepened and extended swiftly. In a few seconds the whole western sky showed like some stricken field of heavenly warfare. Not the delicate rosy flush of its normal setting; not even the regal splendour of its crimson pall, but red, sheer red, it ran—red, in one lurid vast expanse, a ghastly dripping blood-bath of bright red, as though some spouting artery of the universe had been severed. From sea-rim to zenith, for a few fleeting minutes, it reeked and ran an almost sickening gules. Against that overwhelming ensanguined flood, one thick, black, rounded cloud stood out, resting mountainously on the skyline. Outlined upon that tragic background its jetty bulk uprose like the shadow of Calvary.

For a few minutes black cloud and bleeding sky

endured, while the ship rolled slowly on the blood-stained sea. Red light reached everywhere: it lay on every face; was visible in every eye. Then the dreadful colouring of the heavens faded and were subdued to the tender hues of the afterglow.

Had one wanted an omen of evil, there it was. Mac's pilgrimage was almost at an end.

By daybreak next morning the ship was some sixty or eighty miles south of Pisco, and close in to the coast. To starboard lay a long line of yellow sand-hills, a white line of foam at their base, and, in the background, the vast duck-egg blue of the distant Andes.

The ship was leaning gently to the small land breeze, dipping her prow to the refreshing sea that danced away on either hand in the warm rays of the sunshine. It was a glorious morning, and a glorious coast along which to be sailing—grand in its impression of vast height and immensity, but terrible, too, in its aspect of burnt and naked desolation. Over its whole extent, from the white atalayas far inland, to the solemn line of fringing sea, brooded a silence as of a lifeless world.

For long Captain Rodway watched the panorama of the trending coast. He went down as eight bells struck, but came up again a minute or two later. The ship was then passing the point of a small cape, a bare two miles distant, that ran down in shelving slopes of sand from the burnt-brick wall of the sierra. We were opening up a little bay, whose half-mile crescent was a glistening curve of yellow sand.

The captain looked closely at it, then gave the unexpected order: "Back the mainyard!"

Mr. Baxter glanced up in surprise, as though he had not understood.

"Back the mainyard!" said the old man again; and, to me, "Put the boat over the side!"

I was no less astonished than the mate, but set about doing it. The lee braces were slacked away, while the men, with a high note of surprise in their “ Oi-ye, oi-ye, round ’em in, me sons ! ” hauled the yards flat aback and deadened the way of the ship.

“ Bring MacCarthy along ! ” said the captain.

The mate went for’ard to carry out the order, while we lifted the boat out of the chocks, swung her out-board in the davits, and lowered her down to the rail. With the canvas at the main drawing astern, the ship lost way and rode listlessly to the gentle swell.

With the irons on his wrists Mac was brought along. He was a pitiable sight—filthily dirty, with long matted hair growing down on his shoulders and a wild, far-away look in his eyes. For months he had not washed, nor cut his hair, nor changed his ragged clothes. A more pitiful-looking figure than he presented, standing there with his unregarded filth and tragic eyes, Bedlam or lazar-house never sheltered. So a prisoner of the Inquisition might have looked, as he was haled from his dungeon to his doom. The poor fellow had been wearing the irons for so many months that when, at the captain’s order, Chips unlocked them, he still stood with his hands in front of him, as though unconscious of any difference.

“ Take four hands with you in the boat,” said the captain to me, “ and put that man ashore ! ”

So this was it ! We were going to get rid of Mac at last, and marooning was to be the manner of his going. He was to be landed on that lonely beach, and allowed to find his way back to civilization—if he could !

I was staggered at first. It was unexpected, it was high-handed, it was, above all, desperately hard on Mac. I had heard of men being marooned before, but not in this twentieth century. I had known a man tied up to a stringer by his thumbs, with only the ball of his big toes touching the ground. That

was bad enough, but this was worse. Yet strange things sometimes happen when men are left to their own unaided judgment, with no superior court to heed, in unregarded corners of the earth—even at this enlightened day.

Yet, even at the moment, I half-guessed the captain's reasons. All hands, I think, did so too, and felt the force of them : for what was the alternative? Rigorous and solitary confinement for another four or five months. Though at first sight it seemed a monstrous thing to do to land Mac there; yet it at least gave him a chance of life, which it was doubtful if another long period of imprisonment under Cape Horn conditions in a windjammer did. Perhaps he himself would have preferred it so, though of that there was no knowing. He remained as speechless as he had been for months. But, whichever way it was, it needed a self-assured man to make the choice; a weaker one would have let things take their course.

I clambered into the stern sheets, and Jamieson, Bates and two of the men took their places on the thwarts. Mac, without displaying a trace of anger or surprise, allowed himself to be helped into the boat. He was not violent nor dangerous; there was a dreadful unalterable detachment about his manner and movements.

The boat was lowered and we pushed off. Under the steady stroke of the oars we sped easily over the waves that leapt merrily in the morning sun and tinkled over our bows in tiny rainbows of spray. Mac sat impassive. We spoke to him, but he did not answer. With his hairy face staring unseeingly at the yellow cliffs before him, he sat rigidly unresponsive.

We reached the outer edge of the rollers that broke upon the beach. Before us they rose curving; broke into a ridge of foam, and, feeling the friction of the

ground, curled over and fell in sounding thunder on the beach. Turning my head, I saw to seaward the tall vision of the ship, the sun falling in a perpendicular column of light on her filled headsails, and looming like a black pillar on her flattened after canvas.

Giving way, we were lifted on the shoulders of an incoming roller, sped swiftly shorewards, felt the roller collapse under us, and, with the men pulling their hardest, heard the boat's keel grate on the beach. Jumping out we laid hands on the gunnel and hauled her up through the knee-deep surf, out of reach of the backdraft. We were ashore.

We stamped about on the beach and looked around us. The line of beach on which we stood sloped gently up into a dry wind-swept arenal of sand, broken here and there with outcroppings of rock, and bounded by low, reddish-brown cliffs; beyond which again the tawny, black-dotted slopes ascended higher, reaching up and inland until they merged into steep hills and knife-like ridges of rock. Beyond the last black razor-edge, a mile or so away, we could not see. Our position at sea-level fore-shortened the view and shut out the savage wilderness that reached illimitably beyond. It was an appalling coast, and an appalling spot on such a coast, whereon to leave a man to his fate.

Mac scrambled out with us as the boat's keel slid up the beach. Before he left the ship someone had crammed his few belongings into his seaboots and slung them round his neck. They were still there as he clambered over the gunnel, and waded through the shallow water to the dry sand higher up.

“ Well, you see how it is, Mac,” said I, “ your luck's changed, and I hope it's taking a turn for the better.”

“ You'd better shape a course for Ica,” said Jamieson.

"Or Port San Juan," added Bates, "that's nearer, and on the coast."

Unequal to the situation as our remarks were, they were the best we could find to say. At such moments one's talk is always inadequate, and the circumstances scarcely lent themselves to helpful conversation.

To all our remarks Mac turned an unconcerned face, upon which there seemed to flicker the pathetic ghost of his old smile. We said nothing of the difficulties he would have to encounter before he reached civilization, and he himself seemed utterly unconscious of and indifferent to them. Yet they were sufficiently arduous. Ica and San Juan are a hundred and fifty miles apart, and there is no vestige of human life or habitation between them. There is no more inhospitable coast in the world than that of southern Peru; it is the sun-dried, grinning skeleton of the bare bones of earth. Could a man on foot, destitute of all things that make desert travel possible, cross fifty or sixty miles of that region of hungry desolation? It was doubtful. "To hell with this, Mac," somebody said. "Come back with us."

Still he paid no attention. He began to wander off by the seaside, so we ran after him and gave him what assistance we could. We slung the boat's tin of water on a ropeyarn over his back; gave him a pipe, matches and tobacco, and fitted him out with a knife and belt. He accepted the things without revealing the slightest shade of interest. There was no suggestion of resentment or dismay or any other feeling in his manner at what was before him. He stood looking emptily around, tattered and woe-begone, occasionally turning his enigmatic stare upon us.

That moment sticks in my memory. The half-dozen of us on the deserted beach, the gently bumping boat, the solemn un pitying mountains all around, and

to seaward the flashing sunshine and the white picture of the distant ship.

“ Well, so-long, Mac,” we said. “ Ica’s over there,” and a hand pointed to the high eastern barriers of the bay, yellow-flanked and untrodden. “ Step out, and you’ll be home before we shall.”

He had already begun to wander aimlessly off. Never a word had he spoken; we did not know if he understood or not; if he had formed any plan, or had any idea where he was going.

As he trudged away our eyes followed him. He did not look back, but, heading diagonally across the bay, plodded along slowly, his hands before him and his sea-boots dangling behind his back.

We turned to the boat, slewed her round, and pointed her nose out to deep water. Mac did not look back, but kept on across the loose sand. His progress was laborious, and he kicked up the sand in little waves, leaving behind him a line of heavy dots like the track of some prehistoric animal.

We climbed in and, watching our chance, plunged into an incoming breaker and rode through. The oarsmen gave way, and the distance between us and the shore increased.

As we drew near the ship I turned to look shorewards again. Mac was still visible, moving across the sandy waste like a labouring insignificant ant. What thoughts, I wondered, filled that bewildered brain of his as he plodded alone over those arid slopes? Was he glad to be free again? Did he know where he was going? Was he stark mad, or was there some glimmering hope for him?

“ Good job for him he’s out of it,” said Bates, tugging at his oar.

“ Good job for us too,” said one of the men. “ We don’t want no passengers in the paint locker round the ’orn.”

Such seemed the general opinion, and the words

were Mac's valediction, as, for the last time, beneath the shadow of the ship, we turned and saw his tiny black shape, outlined against the blinding sand, moving slowly, endlessly on.

We touched the ship's side, hooked on the falls, and were hoisted up. As the yards swung for'ard again, I glanced once more towards the shore. It seemed very far away; silence and solitude possessed it, and the lean brown flanks of the hills were destitute of that patient trudging shape.

The sails filled, and we stood off on our course. The coastline receded, growing less harsh in its outlines. On its silent stretches of sand the midday sunshine gleamed goldenly. The blue air above was empty, save for a wheeling vulture. That speck in the blue was a sure sign that something living moved beneath. Other eyes than ours had taken up the watch. Our shipmate Mac had passed out.

He passed out—to what bourne I never learnt—and we sailed on without him, under the sombre hills and on the wide sea.

“STAND FROM UNDER”

“ STAND FROM UNDER ”

AT sea, when the day's work was over, a leisurely pipe by the bulwarks or under the lee of the house would set the tide of yarns flowing. Strange stories one would hear at such times, of the loves and hates, the joys and hardships, of a flying-fish sailor's life. Tales of tall clippers, tales of storm and shipwreck, tales of the golden ports, of men—and women—of many races, and of languorous Edens in the soft isles of the south. And tales, too, of eerie happenings, when corposants flared at the yardarms, or the sound of a going was to be heard in the fast-hurrying shapes of clouds in some wild region of the outer sea.

Among these yarns of the uncanny and the supernatural were certain stock kinds, variations from the same original, that persisted. They were nearly always told as coming within the narrator's own experience, though this was merely a device to maintain the interest they had first aroused in the teller's own mind. To retail short stories was no part of a sailor's idea of a yarn. To him yarns were always in the nature of reminiscence.

These queer ghost stories, which were usually told as having happened to some past shipmate of the narrator, belonged to a body of tales which it would not be out of the way to call the traditional folk-lore of the sea. They had no wide circulation or notoriety. Rarely, if ever, were they repeated to wider or more critical audiences than scanty musters of seafaring men, smoking their pipes on the fore-deck, when

supper was over, the ropes coiled down, and there was little likelihood of a call.

The origin of some of these yarns must be very old—Phœnician, a few of them, I should not be surprised to learn. And there was one type, though among the least frequently heard, which inevitably set the hearer's imagination to work.

It was that concerned with a supernatural addition to the ship's company—a belief of very ancient ancestry. It took various forms. Either, it may have been, the ghost of someone previously numbered among the ship's company, who had come to an untimely or a terrible end; or some fiendish visitant, like the sea-spirit of the Ancient Mariner, who came to dog a wrath-marked wretch among the crew; or even, on occasion, the Arch-Fiend himself, in his own Tartarean person, whereof old Captain Johnson gives an explicit instance in his "History of the Pyrates." But, whatever shape the apparition may have taken, a belief in its veritableness has persisted from of old, and been the cause of many a grisly narrative recounting how—

"Manned by more than sailed with us
We passed the Isle o' Ghosts!"

One such account I heard on my first voyage to sea. Mr. Patrick, our third mate, was its author, a man whose memory was singularly well-stored with deep-sea plunder. I have since heard similar but not identical stories, and this one is, I think, a genuine fragment of the folk-lore of the sea.

I remember, when first I heard it, what a thrill it gave me! I was a youngster fresh from home then, to whom the wonders of the deep (though not quite of this calibre) were being opened up and revealed every day. But in recapitulation it loses, I fear, almost all that lent it its novel force and mystery.

The setting, for one thing—an ideal one for such stories—is gone. It was in the vast gloom of a windy night at sea, while the ship was ploughing her way across the wastes of the South Atlantic. Above our heads were shadowy cones of canvas, tipped by scarce-seen trucks wheeling dimly among the stars. The rustle and hiss of water sounded overside, and the only light was the red glow in the bowl of the third mate's pipe.

The third mate, too, was a masterly story-teller, with a natural gift for the vivid and the dramatic. I can picture him now, as he glanced to left and right, making the auxiliar elements abet his words—then looking one full in the face, keen eyes above a firm and steady jaw. He had a trick of stopping at a critical moment, pausing to hunch his broad shoulders and strike a match to relight his pipe. Then, in jerks, between long preoccupied puffs, he would resume. It was an artifice very effective in ghostly narrative.

Lacking such aids and environment, the story is bereft of its greatest asset. But here is the outline of it.

We had been talking about Jonahs on board ship, and the ill-luck that sometimes seems to follow a vessel's track, and the Third struck in: “ There's worse than Jonahs at sea,” said he; “ ‘ ship with the devil, and you'll sail with the devil ’—do you know what that means? Well, just this—if you sail with an out-and-out waster, the devil will be after you to lay claim to his own. And you'll wish you were in another ship. You can dodge fate ashore, but you can't at sea. That story of old Jonah isn't all bluff and bilgewater; he was a sailor who wrote it. The bit about the whale—he meant it for a shark, I'll swear,—I've seen a live jew-fish cut out of a shark—was just put in to make a happy ending. But the other part's true enough. You can't cheat the devil

or fate or whatever you like to call the old ditch overside. She'll lay you bare to the lining of your bones before she's done with you. Sometimes so quietly you'll wonder just how the thing happened; sometimes in a way that puts the fear o' God into a crowd.

"Did ever I tell you what happened on the old *Malacca* a year or two back? She sailed from Liverpool a month or two before we did; I was making my first trip in the *Crusader* then—ever hear of her? No! well, she was a clipper, I'm telling you, could sail rings round this packet.

"And the *Malacca* was no slouch either. The voyage I'm speaking of she was bound out to the Colonies, same as we were, and we heard the yarn out there. She was a flyer all right, but that trip luck was dead against her. She got down to the latitude of the Cape fast enough, then, on the edge of the Agulhas Current, came in for an almighty blow from the nor'ard. It blew the fore topmast out of her—carried away just above the cap—and the whole thing came down with a run. The topmast brought the main t'gallant mast down with it, and in ten seconds there was the devil to pay.

"You haven't been dismasted yet, and you can thank your stars for it! It's like nothing on earth. The sky, clouds and all, seem to come tumbling down above your head. The blocks and broken spars and ends of wire rope come banging and whizzing around you like so many little stars and comets broke loose. . . . You can't hear for the noise, nor see for the mess. . . . You've got to jump like wild cats to cut away the raffle overside before the jagged ends of the spars go through the ship's plates; and if you do look aloft to where the kites were two seconds before, you see nothing but a great hole in the sky. I tell you, dismasting is hell.

"They cut away the *Malacca's* spars, and managed

to jury-rig the foremast. Then the old man put the helm up for Cape Town, not far to the nor'ard.

“They rerigged the ship there, and before they sailed several of the hands cleared out. That was the beginning of the trouble. Sailors were hard to come by in South Africa just then, and it took the old man all his time to get a couple of beachcombers in place of the men who had run.

“He couldn't get any more, so he made up his mind to sail, shorthanded as he was. Just before her crowd lifted the killick, the boarding-house master's boat came off with another hand in her. The ‘pier-head-jump’ scrambled aboard, the runner behind him. Aft they went, and the new man was signed on. Then the *Malacca* put to sea.

“She'd have done better not to have waited. The new hand was a poor, shifty sort of a wastrel, down at heels, with neither kit nor clothes, reference nor discharge book. The old man wouldn't have looked at him unless he'd been so hard up. But he was a human being, and on the strength of that the skipper signed him on. The mate swore when he saw him. ‘If he's no sailorman now,’ said he, ‘he will be before he hits the Colonies.’ A hard case was the mate, a regular tiger-cat with the men—you should have heard the yarns they spun about him out in Melbourne.

“The old packet had hardly got past Robben's Island before her troubles began. A south-easter met her outside, and shook all hands up till they wished they were dead. Then, when they got clear of that, head winds set in and never let up. Sometimes they'd fall light, and the crowd would be worked almost to dry bones trying to ghost her along. Sometimes they'd blow hard, and all hands would look aloft and pray the sticks would fall on them and kill 'em. Better dead, they said, than sail in such a haunted hooker.

“ It was all one; the winds hung ahead, and try what slants she would, the ship was always met with a dead muzzler.

“ And that wasn't the worst. They lost the new main t'gallant mast in a hard blow one night, and had the mainsail blown clean out of her. The crowd cursed her from truck to keelson, and from clew to earring. From the bos'n to Jimmy Dux they were all sick and sore of the life she led them.

“ They began to say queer things about such a hell-fired craft, and of the luck they had. There were hard words knocking about and plenty of talk of Jonahs.

“ The new man who had made the pier-head jump in Cape Town was the particular Jonah they hit on. He was a sullen sort of a waster, and useless at his work. He couldn't steer, he couldn't furl, and he showed himself a coward into the bargain. He took the talk in bad part, sometimes whining, sometimes blustering. Before they'd been a fortnight at sea, the hands were ready to swear he was the cause of all the trouble. There had been a notice posted about Cape Town, time they were there, offering a reward for the murderer of a Dutch farmer out Stellenbosch way. Somehow it got about that the new hand—Vanning was his name—was the man. It was put upon him first in a joky sort of way, but he took it so queerly the thing stuck, and the hands soon began to believe it for gospel. In fact, in Melbourne some of the crowd said he gave himself away, and as much as admitted it.

“ Well, things went on like this for a bit. The ship worked her way east slow as a funeral. It was clew up and clew down, ready about and stand by, and precious little to show for it, night and morning.

“ One evening, they said, when they were somewhere near Amsterdam Island, a queer thing

happened. They were plugging along under t'gallant-sails, butting into the wall of a muzzling head wind, and too far gone to pipe up a growl of 'More days, more dollars.' The crowd mustered aft at the striking of eight bells, and the bos'n sung out: 'Watch is aft, sir!'

“ ‘Relieve the wheel and look-out!’ said the mate, and the hands turned to go for'ard again.

“ As they reached the fo'c'sle door, the watch below to turn in, and the watch on deck to find what shelter they could in the bows—for she was scooping it up green—the whole crowd had the scare of their lives.

“ They saw nothing and they felt nothing—it was what they heard! Out of the blackness above their heads came a cry, a weird and wailing cry it was—coming down, seemingly, from off the topsail yard.

“ ‘Stand from under!’ it moaned, using the regular warning before letting anything fall from aloft. ‘Stand from u-u-under!’

“ The hands stopped dead, and listened. Every man Jack of them was there on deck—had just answered to their names at the muster—and they knew well enough there was nobody else on board. Under the fo'c'sle head the old sailmaker was yarning to the cook; who then in Hades could it be hailing 'em from the fore topsail yard?

“ The hands stopped dead, and stared at one another in a blue wonder. They looked about to see if anyone was missing, and was playing a joke upon them. No good; they were all there. They looked aloft, into the network of spars and rigging. It was too dark to make out anything more than a few ratlines up, but it all looked bare and empty enough. They just stood still in blank astonishment.

“ While they stood waiting, the warning cry piped up again. ‘Stand from under!’ it wailed. ‘Oh, stand from u-u-under!’ There was a sort of despair-

ing whimper in the cry, as though it was all worked up, and couldn't hold out much longer.

"Once more they heard it—farther away this time, as it might be from the royal yard. The last word seemed to come from an almighty distance off, as though the caller, whoever he was, had gone away up and was yelling out of the black belly of the night.

"You can take it from me, the hands were badly scared. They stood still and listened. They stayed on in the biting wind listening, hoping for an explanation, looking at one another. Nothing came. At last somebody made an uneasy move, and that started them off and they shuffled away into the fo'c'sle. Never a one of them suggested scrambling aloft, nor offered to try and find out what it was. 'Tisn't surprising, come to think of it—they'd had a pretty bad jolt.

"They talked it over later. One or two of the hard cases reckoned it was a joke, though, when they were asked, they couldn't put a name to the chap who'd played it. By next morning most of them began to think they must have been mistaken. There hadn't been a voice at all, only the wind or some of the gear chafing.

"And when daylight broke, they were ready to let it go at that. They looked aloft, and the whistling web of spars and sails was all as usual. There was nothing there. The tiers of canvas blew out untouched and a-taunto from the jackstays. They put it down to the parrals wanting a touch of grease.

"All except a few of them, that is. There were those who weren't so sure, or who said they weren't afterwards. They reckoned they knew they had a Jonah on board, and that a curse was flying after the ship. They had it all figured out—afterwards, in Melbourne.

"When he heard of it, the second mate scoffed

at the idea. He had the men mighty sore about their witch on a broomstick. He'd sailed with hemp, had the Second, and he made a fine joke, that almost tickled him to death, about the cat harpings. But the mate took him flat aback. 'I thought I heard somebody sing out : " Stand from under ! " ' says he, ' what the blazes can it have been ? '

" Well, the day passed. The dog watch came and went. Eight bells was struck, the wheel relieved, and the hands tramped off for'ard again. As they came abreast of the fo'c'sle door, they hung in the wind's eye for a moment, and stopped without knowing it.

" Sure as death, there it was again ! As they hung in stays, there came a wheezy whistle from aloft, and that soul-scaring cry out of the blackness. Louder and shriller it was than before—' Stand from under, there ! Stand from under ! ' There was an ugly edge to it this time, as though it were tired of waiting and were giving tongue to a threat.

" The men were rattled—badly. This was too much of a joke. ' Stand from under ! ' is always a warning, a hint to get out of the way as quick as possible, and just then they didn't know but what fire and brimstone might follow that unearthly hail. The hands scattered, not caring to face the sight of what might be let fall in the middle of 'em.

" This time the shout, or the rush of the men to cover, had been heard by the second mate on the poop. He jumped down the ladder and ran for'ard. As he came abreast of the foremast, ' Stand from UNDER ! ' came in a louder, more impatient shout. It sounded red-savage and much closer, from what seemed no higher than the fore yard. The Thing, whatever it was, was itself coming down !

" The *Malacca's* second mate was not the sort of man to be scared by a noise, whoever made it. He threw his head and let out a bull-mouthed roar,

through the hollow of his hands, megaphone-fashion :
' Leggo, then ; LEGGO ! '

" There was a low chuckle from somewhere in the neighbourhood of the foretop. A creaking noise on the foreyard, a whistling shriek through the air, and the sound of a heavy crash on the fore hatch. The Thing had come !

" Mate and men stood frozen stiff. They daren't move ; they daren't speak. They stared into the thick blackness by the fore hatch. There was something there ! something that moved !

" It was too dark to see much, but they could make out a bony, lanky shape that lay all hunched up on the hatch.

" It was alive : they could see that. The fall hadn't killed it. Flames and fury ! *what* was it ?

" They drew their breath in thin gasps : the Thing was more than alive. It was coming towards them ! They could see it move in a cunning, crouching sort of way, like a cat stalking its prey. It moved in long wriggles and little jerks, as though it were after someone and knew what it was about.

" Don't ask me what it was ; what could it have been that fell forty feet, and was now creeping along, watching its chance to spring ? I tell you the Devil, or those he sends on his errands, play hell with a ship who's got a man they're after.

" The *Malacca's* crowd didn't ask what it was ; they just watched—strung up like so many backstays in a gale of wind.

" All of a sudden there was an almighty screech. It was the new hand, Vanning, that made it. The unlucky beachcomber let out a horrible scream, that fairly froze the blood of them that heard it.

" ' It shan't get me ! ' shrieks he. ' I didn't mean to kill him ! Don't let it get me ! '

" He made one spring for the rail—you can guess what the Thing was ; if not the Devil himself, one of

his angels—foam on his lips, and screeching as he ran.

“But murderers don’t die so easily. As he sprang, the Thing sprang too. Fair on his back it lighted, as he stood poised for a wild leap outboard from the rail. Long fingers clutched his throat and lean limbs were twisted round him. The infernal thing clung to his back like a crab.

“For a second they stood so. The panic-struck hands could see them outlined against the black sky, standing out themselves still more blackly. For the fraction of a second they showed up—sure and certain as the Day o’ Judgment. Then, gripping the God-forsaken wretch tightly in its clasp, the Thing—minister o’ vengeance, if ever there was one—sprang—up and out! Far outboard and clear of the ship the leap carried them. They hit the water with a hiss and a heavy splash, still twisted together. The hands heard the splash and saw the flung-up spray. Then the sea closed over the heads of both of them.

“The crowd on board the *Malacca* were brought back to life by the shaking of the lee canvas and the quick rattle of chain in the sheaves.

“‘Holy Michael!’ says they, looking aloft, ‘the wind’s fair!’

“The mate fetches his breath and jumps aft to the compass. ‘Square the mainyard!’ says he.”

THE WRAITH OF THE
POCAHONTAS

A LEGEND OF THE HORN

THE WRAITH OF THE *POCAHONTAS*

A LEGEND OF THE HORN

CAPE HORN is a headland of ill-repute among seamen. That ultimate outpost of the American continent, thrusting its craggy spearpoint far into the austral sea, is unparalleled in the multitude of its devices—whether to trap the unwary or appal the stout-hearted. The might of nature there seems to be leagued with the dark powers of the underworld. As if storm were not enough, it adds to its terrors the eeriness of the inexplicable.

Many and varied are the tales told of perilous passages by dead-and-gone old windjammers, in traverses both east and west athwart its pitch. One such I remember, told of the barque *Pocahontas* in dog-watch yarns about the bogie-fire.

The *Pocahontas* was a wooden-built, "down-east" full-rigger, built in Pictou County in the seventies. In her old age she was cut down to a barque and joined the ranks of the "has beens" in the West Coast run. Forced out of the China and Colonial trades through leanness of freights, she spent the evening of her life in taking coal out to sun-dried, surf-ridden little townships in Chile and Peru, and bringing home nitrate and guano.

In spite of the decline in her fortunes she preserved the air of the old-time aristocrat. To a seaman there was no mistaking her quality; it was obvious in every line of her, from her knife-like run to stately figure-

head—a representation of her namesake, the famous Indian maiden, clad, according to the best clipper usage, in the classic white lead of that era.

On the passage in question, when she added another chapter to the saga of strange sea-happenings, she was bound from Cardiff to a little port in northern Chile. She met with a severe hammering off the Horn, but clawed her way to windward, and, after a week of board and board, managed to slip round.

The night she passed the Ildefonsos was dark and squally, with a razor edge to the wind and the fitful gleams of a sickle moon showing. Ragged clouds swept across the pale crescent of the luminary, throwing a deeper obscurity upon the unbounded waste on every side, or touching with spectral wand the dark hollows of canvas overhead. The few stars seemed plunged immeasurably deep into the profundities of the black void, and flickered and went out like untended lamps in a gusty street. It was an eerie night, a night when the spirit of the southern seas might have been abroad on the tumbling dim expanse, or crouching and a-lurk round colossal, cloud-piled corners of the vaguely-menacing heavens.

With the Ildefonsos astern the *Pocahontas* was surging, almost closehailed, into the strong sou'-westerly gale, thrusting her bows deep and sending the spray flying in sheets through the fore rigging. Ever and anon, to a deeper plunge than usual, a riotous crest would come swirling in over the fo'c'sle head and fall in heavy uproar upon the main deck below. It was as much as the look-out man could do to keep his feet.

Midnight had come and gone. The mate had been relieved and gone below, leaving his colleague in charge of the deck. The main t'gallant-sail was still set and the second mate watched it closely. Stout canvas as it was, a continuous low boom gave warning

of the unremitting strain to which it was subjected. The watch on deck were clustered under the fo'c'sle head, seeking what shelter they could find from the saw-toothed wind and sluicing seas.

Two bells had just struck, and the sharp strokes had been followed by the long-drawn wail of the look-out man: "A-w-ll's well, sir!" when, suddenly, from the direction of the bows, came a sharp cry of pain, followed by the sound of a fall. Not pain only was in the shout, but terror too—sheer, unmistakable terror.

"For'ard there! What's wrong?" shouted the second mate, stopping in his walk and leaning forward to listen.

There was no answer to his hail; only the heavy trampling of boots and the sound of men's voices raised in dismay impinged upon the noises of the wind.

The second mate came down the poop ladder and strode quickly for'ard.

The watch on deck were clustered in a little knot outside the fo'c'sle door, through the half-open aperture of which a dim and smoky light from the slush lamp burning in its interior fell upon them. They were bending over the huddled figure of the look-out man, the lurid flame throwing their forms into grotesque relief and casting weird, flickering shapes upon the bulwarks.

The look-out man, a spare-built, high-cheeked Scandinavian, lay doubled up limply, drawing his breath in short gasps, with the palms of his hands thrown out, as though endeavouring to ward off an assailant or shut out some horrible vision. Two of the men were propping him up heavily in a sitting posture against the threshold of the door, whilst a third was kneeling before him, trying to stanch the blood that flowed from a deep gash in his head.

"What's wrong?" said the second mate, thrust-

ing his way into the little group and addressing the wounded man on the deck.

The latter only groaned. "'E says suthin' jumped out o' the sea and 'it 'im," volunteered the seaman on his knees, who was twisting his scarlet-stained grey muffler into a bandage for the injured man's head.

"Jumped out of the sea?" rejoined the officer in surprise. "That be damned for a yarn! He's been asleep and got a clout on the head from the foresail!"

The wounded man looked at him with dull, fear-troubled eyes. "It schtrike me, and yoomp overboard," he said weakly.

The mate turned on his heel. "Put him in his bunk," said he, with curt disfavour, "and you, Falkner," turning to one of the apprentices, who were standing, all agog, on the outskirts of the little group, "jump up there, and see *you* keep your eyes open!"

The boy did as he was told. The men, casting uneasy glances at the fo'c'sle head, helped their injured watchmate below, and the second mate returned aft.

Perhaps another half-hour had elapsed, during which time the wind had been piping up in ominous gusts, and the pouring seas had become more frequent, surging in over the drenched and streaming fo'c'sle head, before the routine of the watch was again broken.

Three bells had struck, and the mate, scanning the rigid outlines of the t'gallant-sail, had come to a halt by the rail just before the mizzen mast. He was on the point of giving an order, and his lips were parted to the hail, when there rose from the bows a single, blood-chilling shriek. Sharp and piercing, it was the voice of Falkner which rang out in that swift scream of terror.

The boy's scream ended suddenly. Looming steeply before the bows, a big sea drove in over the

fo'c'sle head and fell in heavy uproar over the break. Choked by the foaming torrent, the boy's voice failed; his feet were swept from under him and, loosening his hold, he was carried away in its rush, falling to the main deck, and being washed helplessly aft as far as the mainmast. Drenched and bruised, he scrambled to his feet with the light of terror in his eyes.

He, too, was bleeding from a savage blow. "It's a woman!" he screamed wildly, "it's a woman!"

The mate came down the poop ladder with a bound. "What the devil has got you all?" he shouted angrily.

The apprentice ran to him, his lips quivering. "It's a woman; it's a woman!" he gasped, choking over the words. "She rushed at me and hit me! It's a white woman!"

The mate gripped him by the arm. "You young fool," he began, then, less harshly, as the boy, white-faced and shaken with sobs, clung to him with the unreasoning clutch of fear, "Here, hold up, youngster; you're not dead yet!"

"What's the matter, Mr. Hall?" said a level voice, and the shadowy figure of the captain appeared out of the companion-way aft.

The mate swung round abruptly. "Somebody playing fool tricks, sir," he said; "scaring the men on the look-out. Falkner here has been cracked over the head, and well scared into the bargain."

The captain came down the poop ladder and joined the officer, round whom by this time the men had gathered from for'ard. "Who is it?" he asked sternly, eyeing the face of each of the men in turn.

The boy was still sobbing quietly.

"It wor'n't nobody here, sir; and that's Gawd's truth," said an elderly seaman earnestly. His voice had the ring of sincerity, and he glanced sideways, in evident disquiet, as he spoke.

“ 'E says it was a woman, sir,” added the man with the muffler, who had replaced that bloodstained article of attire round his neck, and now, in a wan shaft of moonlight, showed like a tall and decapitated corpse.

The captain stared searchingly at the speaker, then glanced for'ard. “ Jump up there yourself, mister,” he said quietly to the second mate, “ and take a look round.”

The officer strode for'ard—a sturdy, devil-may-care figure in his battered sou'-wester and thick pilot-jacket—and climbed the steps to the fo'c'sle head. The captain remounted the poop, and the men, evincing evident reluctance to move for'ard, hung around the mainmast, following the second officer with their eyes. They watched him walk into the head, peer over the side, take a long look aloft, and then begin to march steadily back and fore across the break, in the regulation manner of the look-out. Several times, to a swift downward lunge of the head, he was forced to stop and steady himself, laying hold of the rail for support, as the water swept in over the knightheads and careered tumultuously aft.

For the space of a few minutes the second mate kept up his alternate paces to and fro and brief pauses to hold on. For that length of time he held his post unhindered. The lonely moon broke from the fringes of a ragged cloud and threw a pale gleam on the gloom-enshrouded sea, silhouetting in black outline the sailorly figure pacing the bare sea-swept eminence of the head.

Then the clutching fingers of another hurrying cloud fastened on the faint steel of the moon's concavity. To the gathering blast the wind's note shrilled, drawing a wailful chorus from shroud and backstay. The barque's bows dipped more deeply to an oncoming white crest, and, as the bowsprit swerved, stabbing at a lone star beyond its black bulk,

the watchers on the main deck saw, aghast, what thing it was that had come to fill with evil the windy watches of the night.

Close at hand, out of the sea to windward, leapt a huge unearthly figure, clad in spectral white, with long dripping locks, appalling in its aspect of stark malignity. Gleaming through the spray, it showed indeed the shape of a woman—but a woman of no mortal stature. Bare-armed, deep-breasted, with cold and stony eyes, she rose from the deep, giant-like and irresistible—a Valkyr of the storm, inhuman and unholy.

For a moment's space she poised triumphantly on the crest of a wave, then, with vindictive fury, swooped down on the ship.

Too late to warn the object of her attack, the watchers by the mainmast shouted. Like some spirit of vengeance she swept across the deck, struck with stunning violence the helpless second mate, whose back was towards his assailant, and disappeared at once into the boiling sea to leeward, carrying the unfortunate man with her.

Her passing was marked by a frozen silence. The little company of men about the mainmast stood spell-bound and motionless. The terror of that super-human apparition and the malevolence of her attack chilled their hearts within them. Like statues they stood, staring at the bare outline of the fo'c'sle head; awaiting, in unbreathing suspense, a repetition of that demoniacal onslaught.

It did not come. Minutes passed, and still it did not come. The watch below, who had first been disturbed by the entry of their injured messmate, had, ere this, become aware of something wrong, some presentiment of unnatural happenings abroad, and drifted out on deck, unconsciously gathering aft.

By this time all hands were clustered by the break of the poop, silent and watching. No one, officer or

man, evinced any desire to be the first to go for'ard into the lurking place of that hell-nurtured apparition.

As they waited, standing in tense and rigid expectation, a sharp patter of hail beat down upon the deck, the voice of the wind rose in a wire-drawn treble, and the gloom of the night deepened in the hollow dark.

The squall shrilled fiercely upon the ship. The t'gallant-sail hummed under the strain, and the back-stays cracked with a noise like pistol shots. The barque was carrying more sail than she could stagger under.

The captain, with the unconscious habitude of a shipmaster—one to whom responsibility is native, and thought and action are as one—was the first to collect his startled faculties.

“Get the t'gallant-sail off her,” he shouted to the mate at his elbow, pointing upwards to the straining canvas and rigid lines of rigging.

His words recalled the men to a sense of duty. Taking courage at the sound of the order they hurried to the buntlines and hauled feverishly, while the mate let fly the halyards and the heavy fall whirled through the sheaves.

The hands worked desperately. Ever as they laboured they cast continual fearful glances over their shoulders at the deserted fo'c'sle head, which, to the rising wind and sea, was now continuously swept by foaming cascades of water.

Once, as they started the lee sheet, and the barque dipped to a hurtling roller that emptied the sail and threatened to burst it into shreds as it filled again with a thunderous report, they saw that evil wraith rise up upon the weather bow, glare balefully across the empty fo'c'sle head, and slip sullenly back under the waves again.

The weight of the squall was moderating as the hands laid aloft to furl the sail. Out on the yard the

men strained their eyes in the endeavour to probe more deeply into the haunts of their mysterious assailant.

The bunt gasket had been passed and the hands were edging out along the yard. They had grasped the foot of the sail preparatory to a lift all together, when there came a quick cry from the man at the yardarm :

“ Look ! there she is ! ” he said.

Far beneath them, erect on the weather bow, the inhuman figure appeared again. From the crest of a wave it leapt, charged with trailing hem across the deck and plunged into the sea to leeward. A moment later and it swept back ; a third time, and the “ thud-thud ” of its passage was plainly audible upon the lofty yard.

Having no mortal beings to glut its fury upon, it seemed to turn with demoniacal spite upon the solid fabric of the ship herself. The stout teak wood fife-rail was torn from its sockets, the iron ventilator crushed like an eggshell, and the railing at the after end of the head smashed into splinters. The Thing beat upon the iron lighthouses, bursting the glass and extinguishing the lights. The massive capstan alone survived the fury of its onslaught.

Hastily, as the last gasket was passed, the men scrambled down on deck. The wind was still lessening and the first streaks of a grey dawn were breaking over the sea as they gathered aft again.

The minutes slipped by, and the fiendish shape, as though satisfied with the devastation it had made, did not reappear. As though the rage of the elements had been caused by its presence, the ship was now making better weather of it, taking less water and riding to the onrushing seas with an easier swing.

It grew light, and still the dreadful visitant of the

night remained hidden under the sullen grey expanse under which it had last disappeared.

The clear light of morning broadened at length over the unquiet sea, and still it gave no sign of its presence. It was full daylight, and all once more appeared normal about the ship, when the captain picked an iron belaying pin from the rail and, closely followed by the mate, made his way carefully for'ard.

Together the two men climbed the fo'c'sle head ladder and surveyed the scene of desolation before them. The deck was swept clean. Everything—rails, ventilators, cleats, racks of capstan bars—all save the iron fixings of the ship, was smashed and gone. They made their way for'ard and looked over the knightheads. There, likewise, everything had been battered, broken and swept away. Nothing but a trailing litter of ropes—downhauls, footropes, jib sheets—streamed away from the bowsprit. Even the great figurehead, the pride of the ship, the maiden Pocahontas, had been snapped off from the stempost and had disappeared utterly.

As he looked at its empty place a light seemed to break in upon the captain's mind.

"By heaven, the figurehead!" he exclaimed.

The mate looked up quickly, then whistled in amazement.

"Sure as death!" he said slowly, "and that's it! This head sea'll have done the mischief. She'll have broken adrift and battered across the head, foul of the sheets and downhaul. Hell and fury! what a ghost!"

"Damn you," said the old man, shaking his fist at the naked stem and broken scrollwork under the bows, "damn you for a murdering witch. You've done for the second mate!"

Without more words the two retraced their steps aft, and order was given to make sail. As the men

turned to the task, the mate replied to their interrogatory mutterings with a curt explanation. It was received in unsatisfied silence.

“She kenned ower much for a puir cantle o’ wood,” said Sandy, the big Shetlander, regarding the leaking knightheads with gloomy disfavour and many dubious shakings of the beard.

“Aye, an’ she looked afore she rushed,” added the tall Cockney. “Them worn’t no painted dead-lights o’ her’n.”

Down in his cabin the captain made the entry in the official log: “April 7th: Lat. 55 58 S.; Long. 70 30 W.; strong sou’-westerly gale; heavy head sea; figurehead broke adrift, sweeping second mate overboard and injuring two men.”

And there the matter rested, though but few were satisfied. Was it inanimate wood, or some evil spirit of the deep that, on the face of those grey-lipped seas where rise the tusks of the weird Ildefonsos, passed athwart the track of the *Pocahontas* and vented its malice upon her and her company? To this day, among sailormen, two opinions are held.

THE WEST COAST CLIPPERS

THE WEST COAST CLIPPERS

THOSE of us whose experience of sail began only with the present century suffered the limitations of the ships in which we sailed. Our seafaring fell too late in time to have shared in the classic era of the China clippers; too late, even, for much acquaintance with the scarcely less famous heyday of the Colonial wool-clippers. We had to sit respectfully silent whilst our seniors spoke of the *Ariel* and *Lahloo*, the *Thermopylae* and *Cutty Sark*, or even, perhaps, of the *James Baines* and the *Sovereign of the Seas*. It was a willing silence, for, in the matter of fine seamanship, daring navigation, and all-round excellence of naval architecture, those days were admittedly supreme. Personally I can claim to be no more than a West Coast seaman, whose service afloat, until steam swallowed me, was spent almost entirely, with Oriental and Australian divergencies, in the West Coast clippers.

“The West Coast clippers”—the words have a fine romantic sound. They serve at least to describe, sufficiently closely, the ships I have in mind—all those vessels, that is, British and foreign, that in the closing years of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, traded on the West Coast of South America. That stern strip of mountain land was the last stronghold of vessels whose motive power was the wind, and collected upon its thousand leagues of coastline the straggling survivors of all other trades.

They came to it across the breadth of the Pacific,

from Australia with cargoes of coal, or from eastern ports with rice and gunny bags. It was a general rendezvous for all that found charters hard to come by elsewhere, or the pressure of steam competition too heavy. Coal, it might be, or ironwork, or phosphates, that they had brought out to the Colonies from a home port; then, after discharging, they would go round to Newcastle, N.S.W., to load a cargo of coal for some bay or township in Chile or Peru. Vessels, too, that had left England for the Rio Plata or the Cape would find it advantageous to go on from there to the Colonies in ballast, where they might be reasonably sure of obtaining a coal charter for the West Coast. Clippers from the grain and lumber ports of the Western States of British Columbia would also drift down there, flying light and hungry for freights; even the big four-masters of the oil companies came winging their way across from far Japan. To each and all the West Coast was a happy hunting ground in the last lean years of the sail era.

Three and four-masted barques were most of the vessels to be found there, with a sprinkling of full-rigged ships, an occasional French or German five-master, and at times, a strayed white-hulled Yankee barquentine from the Islands. Fine ships they nearly all were; economically found and manned, it is true, but stout, seaworthy craft, and, in spite of all their handicaps, with many a fine run to their credit.

On several of them I served: and cherish the memory of their heavy spars, dungeon-like accommodation, and handsome behaviour in a seaway. There was the staunch old *Kate Thomas*, the spidery-sparred *Port Carlisle*, and the unforgotten *Arethusa*. The *Cortez*, too, I knew—huge and heavy; the speedy *Inverness-shire*, and that leisurely old lady the *Brambletye*.

Mere names are not very interesting, but each and every ship had an individuality of her own. No one

who has hove on the *Port Carlisle's* windlass is likely to confuse her with any other vessel; and the half-deck crowd on the *Kate Thomas* were a privilege to know, and lent the barque a personality it would be impossible to overlook.

These ships were but a few of many. The remnants of all other trades became "West Coasters" in their old age; there they carried on gamely to the end, and from the rolling roadstead of that long-drawn-out littoral the majority of them sailed their last traverse.

Some of the one-time "cracks" of the tea-fleet were to be found there. The *Kaisow*, *Lothair*, and *Windhover* were among them, and joined the ranks of the Cape Horners, even as the famed *Titania*, slightly built and slenderly-sparred as she was, held her own among the big four-masters on the 'Frisco run. The later wool-clippers, looking farther afield for cargoes when freights fell low and Colonial shippers showed a preference for steam-driven transport—the *Cimba* and *Pericles* both showed their green-painted sides in the nitrate ports—were later comers to the same field. The huge steel barques of the Standard Oil Company—the *Brilliant*, the *Daylight* and the rest—all these come under the designation of West Coast clippers, no less than the modern full-rigged ships and three and four-masted barques that had known no other trade from the date of their launching.

Efficient, seaworthy craft these latter were—indeed, they had to be. Cape Horn is not a place to take liberties with, and of all trades in the world the West Coast was least tolerant of weaklings. Some of them ran to a great size—the "horne's" occur to mind, the *Silbahorne*, the *Lyderhorne*, the *Matterhorne* and their sisters; others were trim little barques, such as the *Chala*, *Naiad*, *Allonby*, *Lalla Rookh*, *Ladas* and *Amulree*, but one and all, keen-bowed or bluff, parish-rigged or kept "Bristol

fashion," hell-ship or "sailors' home," they hung on gallantly, making the best of lean times and seeing the thing out to the bitter end. Small wonder that they spent scant money on appearances or the niceties of "spit and polish," but they earned freights and bred sailormen, and gave an added touch of beauty, in their generation, to the wide savannahs of the sea.

The fleets of Fernie, Thomas, Iredale and Porter, De Wolf, Lowden, Hardy and Walmsley of Liverpool; of Law, Denistoun, Dickson, Aitken Lilburn of Glasgow; of Clink, Shankland, Lang and Fulton of Greenock; of Milne of Aberdeen; Taylor of Dundee; Hogarth of Ardrossan; to name but a few of them, were all in their day West Coast traders. Among them were the *Archibald Russell*, the last deep sea sailing ship to be built for British owners; the handsome four-masters *Colony*, *Province*, *James Kerr* and the rest, fine examples of that culminating rig that began with the *County of Peebles* in 1875; the *Dolbadarn Castle* and *Musselcrag*, bald-headed barques, scalped in the interests of economy; the *Lucknow* with an Indian temple for a figurehead, and the *Howth* with nothing at all; the speedy *Crocodile*, old-fashioned *Pengwern*, and smart *Riversdale*. Nor must mention be omitted of the fine ships of A. D. Bordes of Dunkirk, easily distinguishable by their white masts and rows of painted ports on the bulwark plate; as well as the yellow-spaced, black-hulled flyers of Laeisz's Hamburg Line, including the five-masters *Preussen* and *Potosi*. These, and many another staunch cargo-carrier, whose name only lingers in the memory of some salt-scarred old shellback, were the West Coast clippers.

And what a harvest of "sea-troubling beauty" they presented as they lay, stately and swan-like, in solitary units or crowded tiers, in every anchorage of all the long seaboard from Valdivia to Salaverry!

From no matter what point of the coast one might be watching, the steel-clear rim of the horizon was seldom for long unflecked by the white topsails of an incoming or departing clipper. A brave sight it was to see some approaching vessel fold her wings one after another as she neared the land, curtsying as she trod down the long swells; to watch her draw nearer, the bubbles breaking in a myriad of fairy



Off Iquique.

bells beneath her sharp forefoot, the long swish of water murmuring against her sides; to hear the clatter of the blocks and the calling out of the men while she swept slowly past; and finally to hear the hoarse roar of the cable as she rounded to and came to rest, squaring her yards and riding to the swell with queenly grace.

So, in Iquique, I saw the lofty *Brynhilda* come in from her wanderings; so, in a score of ports, I watched numberless of her sisters come gracefully to rest in their haven under the hill. Sometimes, but not always. On occasion one would make port like a driven seabird on the wings of a black storm. I remember, in Iquique, watching a stumpy shattered vessel struggle up from the southward, rust-stained and woe-begone. It was the *Professor Koch*, dismasted in the fierce norther that had swept down the coast, doing immense damage, in July, 1905.

Sometimes a clipper swooped in from the sea and down on her moorings like a plundering Viking on a Saxon hamlet. Such a spectacular piece of seamanship I once witnessed on the part of a four-masted barque in Tocopilla.

Tocopilla Bay forms the segment of a circle, with a bluff headland at its northern extremity and an ugly reef of rocks stretching out to seaward from its southern end. The ships in port lay in a single tier, reaching from close under the lee of the reef to within a quarter of a mile of the headland, and at no great distance from the shore.

One afternoon we saw a barque not far out in the offing standing boldly into the anchorage with every stitch of canvas set. She was heading straight in for the line of shipping before the town and coming along grandly, leaning steeply over, with a flashing bow-wave curling away on either side of her. To an onlooker from the port, it appeared as though she were determined to pile herself up.

On she came, with never a tack or sheet started. The men on the nearest ship ran out, thinking there would be a collision. Still the barque came on, with no sign of shortening sail. Only, as she approached, she was observed to alter course slightly in order to head between the endmost vessel and the headland.

It was magnificent, or monstrous foolhardiness, just precisely which was not apparent.

The stranger stood unwaveringly in till she was within a few hundred yards of the nearest ship and not more than a cable's length from the headland. Then we heard a whistle aboard her. Down went her helm hard-a-port, topsail and t'gallant halyards whined in the sheaves, staysail hanks tinkled swiftly down the stays, and the barque swept boldly down under the stern of the anchored shipping. With lessening momentum she stood straight down the narrow fairway between them and the shore, clewing up sail in masterly fashion. A minute or two more, and she ported again. Then, passing between the end ship and the southern reef, with her bows pointing fair out to sea, and her men furling sail like heroes, she let go her anchor and brought up, in the best berth in the harbour.

It was a superb piece of seamanship—as daring as it was well-timed. The barque turned out to be a German vessel, the *Lisbeth*, but, Dutchman or no Dutchman—and I professed scant love for them before the war, and less after—her skipper was a seaman and his crew real sailormen.

So, from Australia or England, from India, the Cape, or the Far East, with leisurely grace or headlong impetuosity, the wide-wandering fleets of windjammers came in upon the coast. From the tempestuous south, where their spars had stood up against the onslaught of fierce winds and borne the labouring hull through the battery of great seas, league-long and white-crested. Or from the west, through the sunny waters of the mid-Pacific, where countless coral islands lift their green diadems above the blue sea, and the waves are splintered into a Golconda of gems beneath the leisurely-plunging prow. Or maybe from the north, from fresh, odorous pinewood ports, where the silvery edge of

the Cascades frets the eastern sky, they came down, tall-shafted and swaying, through seas of gold and azure, to harbourage in that sombre land that lies under the giant snow peaks of the Cordilleras.

And the ports these tall ships traded to—what of them? They still endure, but, in these bare and smoky days, how changed! Half their glamour is gone since the last square-rigger lifted her anchor, sheeted her topsails home and faded out below the skyline. Strange, white, romantic little townships they were, with high headlands and bare surf-beaten bays between, and the resurgent peaks of the glittering Cordillera standing up behind. A coast not unfitted to be the last haunt of sail, with its solemn hills and unending boom of fringing surf. A coast in no wise devoid of charm through its almost illimitable length, from snowy Corcovado to steamy Guayaquil, and on to sun-bleached California, as far as to the Golden Gate, and where old Flattery plants his steadfast footsteps in the sea.

Throughout its whole extent—in open roadsteads and unsheltered bays, by barren islands and in busy ports—a score of years ago, squared yards were to be seen. The spars of a single ship would rise up solitarily above the sand hummocks of some bleak anchorage in the south, swaying against the background of sombre mountains, and dominating the few sheds and shanties on the beach. They clustered more thickly about the picturesque bay of Valparaiso and the Gulf of Chimba, and were packed like tree-trunks in a pine forest in the crowded tiers of Iquique and the busy wharves of Callao. Northward again they straggled out as far as the Line and beyond: even in backward Colombia, at Buena-ventura, a sleepy, old-fashioned port on an estuary a dozen miles inland, I have seen the disconsolate spars of an aged barquentine sticking up above the

mangrove swamps, like a withered last year's rush in the sedge of a river's bank.

Scores, almost hundreds, of such ports there were: and each and all, to the philosophic mind of West Coast traders, as to the wise man envisaged by the poet, were—more or less—ports and happy havens; while, to the lover of wind-wafted hulls, they were none other than the "last vestige of the age of gold."

The guano-islands of Peru, and the nitrate ports of Northern Chile—these were the citadel and inner holding-ground of this fastness of the sea-gods. North of Arica it was guano; between the parallels of 19 and 26 degrees it was nitrate.

Scattered in thick deposits over the great salt desert of Tarapaca the nitrate is found, lying in beds and depressions just below the surface and extending to a depth of ten to twelve feet. Its presence on those uplands goes to show that at some remote period the whole region must have been under water.

To those seamen in whom inquisitiveness triumphed over weariness the method in which it was obtained was a familiar one. Holes were bored through the surface deposit and the thickness of the ore beneath to the underlying bed of rock or gravel. A dynamite charge was then inserted and exploded, scattering the ore in all directions. The pieces were collected and carted to the factory or "oficina," where they were pulverized by machinery. The stuff was then boiled in water, and allowed to run off into shallow pans. There it crystallized, and the product, a yellowish-grey mixture of nitrate of soda and common salt, was bagged and put on rail for transit to the coast.

The distance was not great, and, in many places, an endless wire cable stretched down from the coastal ridge to the end of the loading mole. It worked a

mono-rail system of cars, by means of which the nitrate was conveyed to the point of embarkation.

The nitrate came off to the ships in lighters. One or two at a time the bags were hoisted on board by means of a "dolly winch," manned by four members of the crew. Another man slung them inboard, and a third seized them at the hatchway and slid them down below.

In the hold the bags were built up in the form of a pyramid, with buttresses ("keys" we used to call them), thrown out to the ship's side at intervals. They soon set into a solid block, and by the time the ship reached her port of discharge the bags had been burnt brittle, and the stuff had almost to be discharged in bulk.

Among other disadvantages nitrate is highly inflammable, and much care had to be taken against the risk of fire by vessels loading it. Ordinary extinguishers are useless; water, which has percolated through nitrate and is saturated with its properties, is the only effective antidote. Barrels and tubs of such a liquid were placed by the side of each hatch, in readiness for any contingency. Smoking on deck, moreover, was sternly forbidden, and added another hardship to life on the coast.

Yet the precaution was necessary. The burning of the *Reliance* was a case in point. She was a four-masted barque, loading nitrate in the tiers at Iquique. She caught fire, and the flames soon obtained such a hold that she had to be abandoned. A tug's hawser was made fast on board, and she was towed out to sea, where she was allowed to burn down to the water's edge.

A wonderful sight she looked, flaring fiercely to the mastheads—a wind-blown pyramid of flame, hissing and crackling, and a warning to every ship within a radius of several score miles. She burnt completely out, but did not sink. Her hull remained

sound—she was Liverpool-built, of honest iron plates—and when the fire failed for lack of fuel, she was towed back into port. Her voyaging days were done, but not her career of usefulness; for she was sold to the Chilenos, and her hulk was used for many years as a storeship in Iquique. There for long she lay, blackened but recognizable—the inshore ship of the second tier.

A strange, rough life it was that one led on the coast, so dissimilar in its character to any other corner of the world whither ocean-traffic wandered. Anchorages were often in open roadsteads, where sail must be left bent on the yards ready to be sheeted home in a hurry; crews worked their own cargoes, both in and out, and not seldom in their own boats; fresh provisions and plenty of water were the exception, not the rule; and communication with the shore was, as often as not, both difficult and dangerous.

Yet there were compensations. The stern and barren shoreline, with its dusty little pueblos scattered sparsely in the curve of bays, or tumbled higgledy-piggledy in the hollows behind high-ridged promontories; the lofty mountain barrier that lifted its ramparts interminably to the east; and the line of surf, crooning in slumberous repose or breaking in thunder on the cliffs, was a fine harbourage to steer for, and an ideal cruising-ground for a man with a taste for solitude or a love of nature in his soul. The very bleakness of it, its wide silences peopled only by birds and seals, its utter lack of foliage, of water, of all the amenities of civilized life, only added poignancy to the insistence of its call. The man who has once trodden its Circean soil

“ O se vuelve enamorado,
O se queda prisionero,”

say the Spaniards, and very truth is in the words.

A fitting stronghold and rallying ground it was for the last stand of the unfettered gipsies of the sea. There they stood out to the bitter end, and from its rugged edge most of them sailed their last tack and fetched to Golden Harbour. Even into the second decade of the present century, when steam and internal combustion were predominant elsewhere, their few survivors still hung on to that stony fringe of Spanish America, and dipped in last farewells under the shadow of its solemn Cordillera, going gallantly out upon the selfsame wind that had blown Pizarro south.

Such was the West Coast and its clippers. Though they came in the rear of the great and gallant days, the nature and extent of the experience they afforded were second to none, and in the true line of blue water tradition. After all, it was the primordial seas they sailed and the winds of God that sped them. The man who had made a West Coast trip and traversed the South Seas, by whichever gateway he had entered—the Australian or the Horn—had practised his sea-craft on an ample stage, and had shared in the last phase of that type of oceanic navigation which Columbus, Magellan and Drake inaugurated.

THE PASSING OF SAIL

THE PASSING OF SAIL

“A THING of beauty,” the poet has said, “is a joy for ever.” If it be so—and who can doubt it?—there is little likelihood that sailing ships will soon be forgotten. Beauty, spacious and intriguing, was their birthright; grace of motion and symmetry of outline their endowment in superlative measure; and the authentic spirit of romance, which is the dower of beauty, a halo broad upon them and around them.

To the men who sailed those ships, and to the many more who loved them, there is comfort in the thought. The swift, shapely hulls, each sitting the water like a resting gull; the wind-filled fabrics aloft, which resembled, in their white contours, the fleecy masses of cloud above the skyline of the Trades, have gone. But in their going they have suffered an apotheosis, like that which befell the winged courser of Perseus. Passing from the oceans of the world, they have not passed beyond the ken of those who set beauty above utility, nor is it in the waters of Lethe that their star has set. A fairer fate has met them. On the happy seas of memory, by coasts of old renown, and flushed with the rainbow hues of the imagination, they rest secure—a thing of beauty inalienably, and a joy for all time.

In this excelling grace and fairness that was theirs, here and not elsewhere, lies the fascination of clipper ships. Other criteria may condemn them, but this never. From an economic standpoint they

have become obsolete in consequence of the superior efficiency of the steam-driven vessel. But from an æsthetic point of view the position is far otherwise. Who would be so hardy as to maintain that a steamer is more beautiful, more a swaying vision of pure loveliness, than a white-winged Sou'-Spanner, a-tiptoe on the blue rim of the world, with spray-bows bejewelling her track, and the winds of heaven a-frolic in her sails?

No! where beauty is the theme, the grim fire-dragons of the present day must yield place and honour to the gracious white sea-maidens of the past. Modernity has much, but not that. Adaptability to the needs of commerce, excellent skill and cunning in point of construction, the wonder-working appliances of science vibrant at every corner, grim power in every line—all these and more the modern steamship may boast of, but sheer beauty—no! She yields there to the humblest vessel whose motive power is the wind.

No lighthouse on a lonely rock, no stately Gothic ruins peeping down an avenue of trees, could ever be more supremely in keeping with their environment than was a clipper ship under sail. Such harmonious accordance with the elements was an underlying necessity of her being. So with the secondary details of her construction. Every curve of speed and angle of strength, every spar, every stay, every rope, which made up the intricate tracery of her fabric aloft, had to be fashioned with one sole end in view—faithfulness to its function and to the calls certain to be made upon it.

“ All that line

Drawn ringing hard to stand the test of brine,”

as Masfield finely says; and the result was beauty, beauty complete if unconsciously attained, beauty

no whit less compelling in that its designers strove only to be faithful to another ideal—that of worth of material and honesty of workmanship.

If it is chiefly on the score of their exceeding fairness that clipper ships can lay claim to be remembered, they have other reasons also to prevent them from becoming alms for oblivion. Few other instruments devised by man so seize the imagination. Their appearance synchronized with one of the great periods of the world's history, and their achievement was in keeping with the age. Their annals, scarcely longer though they are than the span of a single human life, constitute a record of surpassing skill, enterprise and endurance. They read like the epic of another Hakluyt; and in the person of Mr. Basil Lubbock another Hakluyt they have found.

The clipper ship era is a chapter unique in history, and a chapter, alas, which is now closed. The *Lochs* and *Shires* have gone the way of the *Santa Maria* and the *Golden Hind*; sailors now must be mechanics instead of athletes; and those who hold the old allegiance must plead pardon for championing a lost cause.

Yet it may be excusable to call to mind some of the ways in which clipper ships furthered the advance of civilization. From the outset of the era of which they were the last representatives, adventure, commerce and dominion were enlarged.

By means of the sailing ship the geographical discovery of the world had been made possible and accomplished. Sail instead of oars, the compass instead of the coastline—and for five thousand years sailormen had waited for these inventions—were the keys that unlocked the portals of oceanic navigation. By their aid Columbus held his way undaunted to the westward and revealed a new world to the astonished gaze of the old. By their aid Magellan

put a girdle round the earth, and by their aid these two greatest of the early pioneers were followed by a host of hardy seamen in adventurous caravels and lumbering galleons. From Zent to Zanzibar, from Ultima Thule to the Land of Fire, the argosies of commerce traded on strange virgin shores, and the salt estranging sea became a highway for man's feet.

So the Golden Age of Sail began, and so for three hundred romantic years it pursued its adventurous course.

Spice from the Moluccas, and skins from the Arctic, gums of Benin and jewels of Golconda, dragons' blood from China, African ivory and South Sea pearls—never did Tyrian keels, in the morning of the world, traffic from Punt or Tarshish richer and more wonderful cargoes than in those affluent years glutted the wharves of England's seaports. Endlessly from over the skyline came stately frigate or sturdy brig crammed full of the riches of the world, gathered on far coasts and piloted through strange waters, cunningly handled by watchful-eyed men, and guarded from foreign power or piratical bravo by steadfast rows of guns and the keen edge and point of trenchant steel laid ready to hand.

So, in gallantest show, that passed: and—as the brave centuries went by—grey wisps of smoke began to gather on the skyline and befoul the purity of God's own seas. They marked the advent of steam and the coming of a stark and stripped young giant, vigorous and invulnerable, to contest the supremacy of the seas. And gallantly the royalty of the reigning hierarchy responded to the challenge.

There was a long farewell to the leisurely ways of the lordly East Indiamen. The lingering scroll-work of Stuart ships disappeared, the bulging lines that satisfied John Company became sharp and concave, the lofty masts became loftier still, bellying stuns'ls fluttered at each yardarm high as the royals,

and, spreading her wings like some gigantic sea-bird, the clipper ship stood forth to battle for her birthright.

And then began the most wonderful era in the long story of the ship. In that protracted and unceasing struggle, which had the Seven Seas as its battleground, the world, as we know it to-day commercially and politically, was evolved. During its course the most pagan coast and the smallest island were linked up in the all-entangling mesh of civilization. The last recesses of the great oceans were visited, their highways charted and surveyed, and the earth's remotest bounds laid under contribution by the keels of commerce.

More than any other single cause the discovery of gold in California may be said to have been the compelling impulse that brought the clipper ship so speedily into fully-fledged being. Certainly it was that event, with its world-reaching consequences, which, more than anything else, gave the design its extraordinary initial impetus. The universal demand that it gave rise to—of more rapid means of transit between the overburdened east and the young and stripling west—resulted in that extraordinary outburst of “down-east” shipbuilding, and in those fleets of desperately-driven clippers that dotted the stormy path around the Horn for nearly half a score of years.

So, again, the finding of the precious metal in Australia evoked a fresh race of clippers, and called into the field another nation of competitors, in the shape of the British, whose splendid Colonial fleets of fast-sailing merchantmen marked a permanent advance in their country's path to maritime supremacy.

What had begun in the rush for gold was continued by way of other commodities, no less useful if not so spectacular. Tea and the trade with the treaty-ports of China; wool and the concomitant

opening-up of the vast Southern Continent; rice and the exploitation of the riches of the east; cotton, sugar and rum, the harvest of the West Indies and meridional America—all these and more afforded a field for the traffic of clipper ships.

Throughout the whole period the latter were in continuous competition with the growing power and importance of steamers. Waged on purely economic grounds, the issue of the conflict was never in doubt, and gallantly though the clippers fought, they were driven gradually but relentlessly—from the heyday of their fame in the tea-trade of the sixties—from one after another of their accustomed trading-routes. The era which had begun with the carriage of human freight, both passenger and emigrant, with gold and the riches of the Orient, ended in the drudgery of the coal, guano and nitrate trades, and in the transport of such bulky commodities as oil and lumber—unremunerative and without appeal to the imagination.

The long contest ended in the defeat of the clipper ship and in her practical elimination from the pathways of the sea. Yet it was a defeat as glorious as many victories. For half a century, at least, they held their own against the rapid advance of mechanical science. The significance of the fact is apt to be overlooked. In its very nature a mechanically-driven vessel is so much more economical and regular than one whose progress is at the mercy of the winds, that it is a remarkable fact that sailing ships held their own, side by side with steam, for so long as they did, and were not at once superseded as completely as were, let us say, stage-coaches on the introduction of railways. The reason is not far to seek. It lay in their superb design, as adapted to the element in which they floated as are the contours of the dolphin to the limitless expanse of tropic seas; in their masterly

sail-plan, and in the consummate skill with which they were commanded and sailed.

Astonishing indeed was the skill with which these superb creations were handled. The giant clippers of the California trade were driven to the last verge of daring. Stories are told of captains who padlocked their t'gallant sheets, and—tales of more sinister import!—of untried crews who were driven to their duties by urgent means of sheer terror. These first “Cape-Horners,” however, were soft-wood ships and their lives were not of long duration by reason of the tremendous pressures they were called upon to bear. So, too, the American-built Black-Ballers. Magnificent ships though they one and all were, with lines that were the admiration and envy of the “wood-butchers” of Liverpool, as Donald Mackay called them, they were at their prime for only a brief period, and, with the subsidence of the Australian gold-rush, their place as the aristocracy of the sea was taken by the smaller and more durably constructed tea-clippers. But there was no decline in the quality of the seamanship on board the latter; rather, if possible, the reverse. Captain Moodie rigging a jury-rudder to the *Cutty Sark* in the stormy seas to the southward of the Cape; the *Sir Lancelot* sailing up the Hughli—“James and Mary” and all—to her moorings at Calcutta; the *Chrysolite* navigating Macclesfield Strait in the darkness and a gale of wind; these things afford the measure of tea-clipper seamanship.

And the speed of these famous flyers was as outstanding as their weatherly qualities. It was the wonder of their own generation, and has been a congenial topic of conversation among sailormen ever since. Many of the passages that they made were remarkable and not a few of them were astonishing. As a general rule it may be said that the Yankee-built clippers were at their best in heavy

weather, and the narrow, heavily-sparred Chinamen fastest in tropical waters. The *Flying Cloud*, *Lightning* and *James Baines* were among the speediest of the former; the *Thermopylæ*, *Cutty Sark* and *Sir Lancelot*, perhaps, among the latter. Some of the records that they made constitute wonderful pieces of sailing. Apart from the sensational performances of the vessels mentioned above, a number of ships put up noteworthy runs. The *Ariel*, eighty days from London to Hong-Kong; the *Wendur*, twenty-nine days from Newcastle, N.S.W., to Valparaiso; the four-masted barque *Eudora*, fifty-seven days from the Eddystone to Coquimbo; and the *Desdemona*, twenty-six days from Cape Town to Sydney, are instances. Such passages will bear comparison with anything that had gone before or that is likely to come after. Never again will a trading keel, impelled by the winds alone, travel from 50 South in the Atlantic to 50 South in the Pacific in six days. To a most arresting page of history the word "Finis" must be written.

It is so indeed; the clippers have gone for ever; their wonderful runs are but a memory. The records they established, both for speed and in other spheres, stand fast, and are never likely now to be challenged or lowered—save perhaps in waterside taverns or by bollards on old-fashioned quays, where ancient mariners foregather, and Ossa is piled upon Pelion as the talk goes to and fro. The ships themselves and the romance which was their life have gone for ever; "the old order changeth yielding place to new," and the complex tracery of spars and rigging, of wind-filled, white-arched spires towering up into the blue, with the skilful brain and cunning hand that directed them have sailed their last traverse.

Where are they now? the unharnessed winds

may ask, where their sheeted tiers of canvas and the opulent stowage of their holds? Where their skilful commanders and their cheery crews? Fire, storm, and leak have taken toll of them down the passage of the years, with the reefs of many a coast and the more abysmal perils of the open sea. Among the last of their race a gallant few fell under the blows of submarines in the Great War, and the bare residue, an indomitable band, came stubbornly to be broken up in the ports and river-havens from which they had first been launched.

Whatever their fate, one may say, it was but the doom of their temporal and tangible shapes—their plates and spars and planking. Not all that went to make up the fabric of their being perished by stress of wave and reef, by dint of hammer and torpedo stroke. The memory of their achievement and the vision of their beauty lives enduringly on. Of each and all, whatsoever may have been the particular manner of their going, one may contentedly hold with that poet of the southern continent :

“ ‘ The white swan ships, beloved,
That through the morn have gone,
Sail out ’—so wilt thou whisper—
‘ To far-off Avalon.’ ”

Avalon, even so—Avalon or another. Call it what one will—Avalon, the Hesperides or Hy-Brasil, the Golden City of Saint Mary, or the peaks of Kaf, “ those last blue mountains barred with snow,” by whatsoever name it be known—there, in that port of happy ships, by the side of trireme, dromond and galleon, there, drowsing the long tides idle, the clippers fold their wings, like halcyon birds of calm, and rest untroubled on the charmèd wave.

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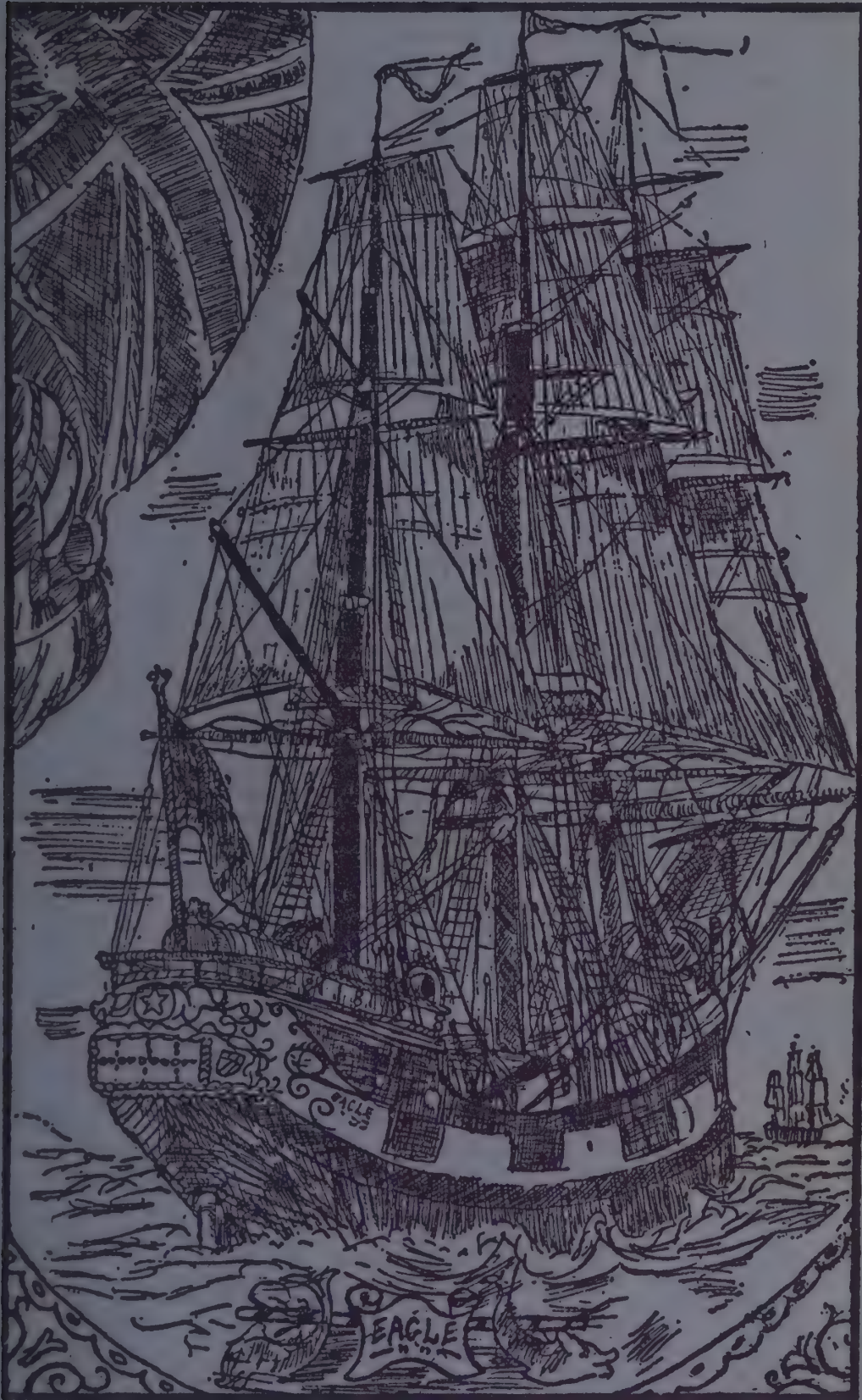
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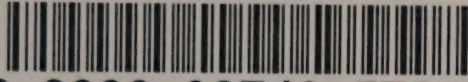
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